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THE SUFFICIENCY
OF THE
EXTERNAL EVIDENCE
OF
THE GOSPEL
Farther supported against the REPLY
OF
The Reverend Mr. Heathcote
TO
ST. PETER's CHRISTIAN APOLOGY,
WRITTEN
IN DEFENCE OF A SERMON
ENTITLED
THE CHRISTIAN APOLOGY,
Lately Published at Oxford, at the Request of the
Vice-Chancellor and other Heads of Houses;

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Our principal business must be to obtain a thorough acquaintance
with the Christian faith: FIRST the GROUNDS, THEN
the DOCTRINES of it. Bishop of OXFORD's charge, P. II.

O X F O R D,

Printed at the THEATRE for S. Parker: And Sold by J.
Rivington in St. Paul's Church-Yard, Messrs Rivington and
Fletcher in Pater-noster Row, London: and Messrs Newton in
Manchester. 1757.



Advertisement.

MUCH clamour having been raised by answerers, preachers, reviewers, and prefacewriters, against the doctrine of the *christian apology*, as if it had denied the powers, and discouraged the use of reason, and propagated the spirit of enthusiasm and fanaticism, the reader is desired to take notice that no sort of attempt hath been made by any one of them to support this charge.

I. THE valuable strength and power of reason lieth in deducing just conclusions from true and real premises: all other exercise of reason may be amusing, but faileth of advancing *real knowledge*, the proper and genuine task of this noble faculty.

THE truth of those propositions, which in reasoning are termed premises, is then *perceived*, when we perceive such a relation between the terms of them, as their affirmation or negation importeth; and this truth is then *real*, when the ideas signified by those terms are representative of *real* beings; it is then fantastical or chimerical, when the terms signify fancies or chimera's, some figments or pictures of imagination which are not representative of any thing that is known really to exist. And such as our ideas are, which

are employed in reasoning, such will be the knowledge resulting from it: it will be *real* if those ideas be *real*; it will be *fantastical*, if they be so.

THE science of metaphysics, therefore, dealing chiefly in ideas of spiritual things, which are framed by the mind, and not known to have any thing existing in the nature of spirits corresponding to those ideas, is, so far, a chimerical science; and accordingly, the confidence with which metaphysicians would obtrude upon us their conclusions (however closely deduced from their premises) concerning God and his attributes, acts, and methods of proceeding; this confidence, I say, is therefore checked in the *christian apology*, and its *farther illustration*, without any denial, it is hoped, of the *powers*, any discouragement of the *use* of reason, whose true strength, and profitable exercise lieth in the investigation, not of chimerical, but of real truth. And because it is rashness, and abuse of reason, to employ her in forming conclusions dogmatically from uncertain premises, or to decide concerning the truth of any doctrine or the propriety, wisdom, justice &c. of any recorded fact, without a competent knowledge of the circumstances, motives and constitution of things on which that doctrine is founded, or that fact was brought

brought to pass ; hence hath the author of the *Christian Apology* asserted, that infidels do absurdly demand, that all difficulties and seeming improprieties in the pretended doctrines, acts and dealings of God recorded in the scriptures, be cleared up and justified to them, previously to our allegation of what is commonly stiled the *External Evidence* of revelation : and that christian advocates do as absurdly undertake a task which sober reason will readily acknowledge herself to be unfurnished with necessary materials for accomplishing : that therefore, the true province of reason with regard to revelation, is to examine those *evidences of fact*, to which the original preachers of it constantly appealed in proof of it's divine origin — to enquire, first, whether they be sufficiently attested ; and next, whether they be genuine efforts of divine power, and thirdly for what purpose they appear to have been exhibited ; and lastly, to deduce from the result of these enquiries such a conclusion as they naturally point out.

How these representations do *deny the powers*, or *check the use of reason*, hath never yet been attempted to be shewn ; and we will venture to assert, in opposition to this random insinuation, that they have, indeed, *asserted her powers and privileges*, having rescued her, as it were

were, from a state of enchantment, in the regions of fancy and chimera, and placed her upon that firm ground of facts, on which alone her true strength and abilities can be efficaciously exerted.

But the vulgar cry is able sometimes to mislead the best understandings. "Few will go such lengths against the use of reason, we apprehend, as Dr. P. has done," saith a sensible writer in a late monthly work, who yet, in the words immediately following, hath, in an ample and unlimited manner, espoused that very principle of the *Christian Apology*, which gave rise to the unreasonable clamour in which he himself, we see, hath joined against it.

His words are these "We cannot help thinking, that there is a great deal of truth in what he (Dr. P.) says, concerning the advantage given the *Deists*, by the manner in which many of our modern divines have argued in defence of christianity. The divinity of our Saviour's mission may undoubtedly be proved, in a very satisfactory manner, without entering into metaphysical reasonings and disquisitions concerning the dispensations of providence, or attempting to assign reasons for the divine conduct, in cases where we must necessarily be supposed very incompetent judges. Such a method

"method of defending christianity opens a door
"for eternal wrangling and debate, and is sel-
"dom found to have any other effect upon un-
"believers, but that of confirming their preju-
"dices. When the truth of christianity is once
"established by *facts, and plain reasonings upon*
"*facts*, it will be altogether unnecessary to make
"any reply to such as raise objections against the
"wisdom, justice, or goodness of the divine
"procedure; since, when it has been once pro-
"ved, that the deity has acted in this or the o-
"ther manner, the wisdom and goodness of his
"conduct must be admitted by all those who
"profess to believe in an all-perfect Being."

2. To the charge of Enthusiasm and Fanaticism it is impossible to plead, until the terms of it shall be stated and defined. No two words are more fashionable in these days, or used with less of meaning or precision. Whatever they import, Mr. Heathcote hath certainly the honour of leading the tribe of writers who have imputed them to such as recommend and insist upon the truly, and indeed, the only rational evidence of the gospel, *the works which bear witness to the son of God that the father hath sent him.*

ALL that was necessary to be said in support of the method of *Christian Apology* recommended in a late Sermon, hath been offered to the publick in what was intended for a *final*, and, as I trust it is found, a satisfactory answer to all Mr. Heathcote's reasonings: his revilings I confess to be unanswerable.

BUT as he hath, in his late *Reply*, greatly misrepresented the argument of the sermon, and of the pamphlet entitled *St. Peter's Christian Apology &c.* which undertook the defence of it; the importance of the doctrine of those books, which the author is earnestly desirous to clear of every shadow of objection, hath induced him to break through his resolution and to endeavour to give entire satisfaction to the publick upon this subject.

It would be matter of real concern to me, if any good man should think any expressions too warm and vehement have escaped me in this controversy. However furiously and unprovok-edly Mr. Heathcote bounced out and fastened on me, I am conscious it was the duty of a Christian to remember the example of HIM, *who when He was reviled reviled not again.* All that

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I have offended in this way, all the *very scurrilous and abusive language* thrown out by me against him, amounteth, in Mr. Heathcote's own account of it, to this — That *I have the rudeness to insinuate that he is little more than a boy*^a — That *he is perfectly unacquainted with the nature and force of reasoning* — That *his attempts in this way are weak and confused* — That *he hath no distinguishing faculty* — That *his understanding is a shallow one* — That *his misrepresentations, gross as they are, do not proceed from malice, but ignorance*^b — He would take, we see, the charge of malice more kindly than that of ignorance — That *he is superficial in his reasoning, and savage in his stile*^c — That *he is chargeable with downright want of honesty*.^d

WHETHER, and how far this accusation of me is true, may be seen by turning to those seven pages of St. Peter's Chr. Ap. to which Mr.

a Reply p. 12. I find no such insinuation in my two pages referred to by him in support of this charge, unless my having called him in both, Mr. Ralph Heathcote, be one. Is it sufficient to pacify him, that I meant no such insinuation? believing the difference of our ages to be little or nothing. He hath, however, in the same page, taken some sort of revenge for this fancied insult, by calling his adversary foolish and ridiculous for it, telling him that, boy as he is, he may chance to shew that he is "above his match."

b P. 13. One is at a loss to discover whether Mr. Heathcote setteth a greater value upon his moral or his intellectual accomplishments. In this place he is uneasy that his *honesty* is complimented at the expence of his *understanding*: four pages farther, he hath impeached his *understanding* in order to bring off his *honesty*: having accused himself of two *blunders*, to repel the charge of unfairness. See Reply p. 17. where another blunder which he made is spoken of.

c P. 13.

d P. 25.

Heathcote

Heathcote appealeth for evidence of it. And when the reader hath made this examination, he may, if he please, cast his eye upon the nine pages of Mr. *Heathcote's* first performance, and the thirty eight pages of his last, referred to in the margin^a, that he may convince himself how much this gentleman is “above my match” in his own species of argumentation, that is, in what he stileth “little strokes of severity and “satire,” wholly consistent, in his account, with candor, urbanity, and politeness,^b but what the candid and polite will give up to the true proprietors, Mr. *Heathcote's* draymen and oysterwomen,^c and will be apt to recollect, upon the occasion, that filthy torrent exhibited in Dr. *Swift's* description of a City-shower.^d

IT is not my intention to trespass needlessly upon the reader's time. Where truth alone is sought, brevity will necessarily attend the search, which will not be suffered to deviate into needless, parading digressions, or to imitate the trifling vanity of those

Who think they grow immortal while they quote.

^a Use of R. p. 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 65, 80, 81. See also Reply p. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 42, 47, 59, 60, 83, 91, 105, 108, 109, 125, 132, 140, 150, 154, 156, 157, 168, 169, 171, 176.

^b Reply p. 7. ^c P. 175.

^d Sweepings from butcher's stalls, dung, guts, and blood,
Drown'd puppies, stinking sprats all drench'd in mud,
Dead cats, and turnip-tops come tumbling down the
Flood. }

THE short question under debate is, "Whether the miracles of the gospel, miracles attested with a singular and unparalleled strength of evidence", do demand an implicit assent of the mind to the truth of the doctrines they are adduced to confirm for divine, altogether superseding the need of any antecedent, abstract speculations, any reasonings *a priori* concerning fitness, propriety, probability, grounds and reasons, or concerning the correspondence of the matter of this revelation with common notions, or the principles of a supposed natural Religion?" — Or "whether, before the evidence of miracles is admitted as a proof of the divine origin of the gospel-revelation, the matter of this revelation must be examined by the standard of common notions, and must be made appear to be conformable, or at least not contradictory, to any manifest truth natural or moral?"

THIS is the plain state of the question. The *Christian Apology* and its *Defence* have asserted the former branch of it, and Mr. Heathcote the latter. If the ascertaining of truth was his, as it ought to be every christian writer's only aim, might he not have advanced his own sentiments, and pleaded for them to the utmost of his skill, without that rage of abuse and virulence which hath mixed itself with almost every page he hath written? Would not his arguments have had their own real weight, if they had been urged with decency and good manners? Had the au-

thor of the sermon ever offended him? And if, as he pretendeth, he really conceived the principles of it to have a pernicious tendency, did it give the least advantage to his reasonings against them, to treat with insolence and contempt the person who advanced them? — whom, as he informeth us, “he took, (at that time) to be “a sincere and well meaning man.” Or, doth it not rather betray a consciousness of the weakness, either of his cause or the management of it, to try to help them out by personal abuse and bitterness?

Or, if this kind of stile and language were indeed, what surely it is not, the *sharp rebuke*^a commanded by St. Paul to be addressed to gain-sayers, yet who are they that are to be the subjects of this rebuke? Are they not such as pervert and resist the *faithful word* and *sound doctrine* of the gospel, *teaching things that they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake* — “ flattering the lusts “ and pride of those who are holden and over-“ whelmed by them; lulling their disciples into “ a fatal security, by persuading them that they “ may be Christians with the habitual renuncia-“ tion of every Christian temper.”

If there be no such persons in this nation, if this be an ideal character, the seeming warmth with which it is delineated doth not affect any one, for no particular persons are named or hinted at^b; but if such there be, and have been, then

^a Reply p. 6. ^b Tit. i. 13. ^c Christ. Apol. p. 33.
See Reply, p. 177.

^d The reader is therefore requested to take notice how unjustly
Mr. Heath-

Mr. *Heathcote* will not surely deny that it was strictly the duty of a christian preacher, to caution every youth whom he was addressing, to beware of such dangerous associates ; “ to make “ haste out of this broad way which promiseth “ life but leadeth unto destruction, and to take “ him for their guide who is the way, the “ truth, and the life.” But, to rebuke sharply, in Mr. *Heathcote*’s sense, that is, to treat with insolent contempt and contumely, him who hath pointed his reproof where the apostle directeth it, what is this but taking part with the *unruly and vain talkers, and deceivers*, against whom St. *Paul* hath, in the passage referred to, so peremptorily declared himself ? The reader must not be longer detained from what is material in this debate, and I shall reserve matters of smaller consequence to be spoken of in the close of these sheets.

I hope there is no contest between Mr. *Heathcote* and myself concerning the *truth* of our holy religion. We both, I trust, acknowledge that Jesus Christ is, what the Scriptures represent him to be, the God and Saviour of mankind ; that all that the bible hath taught, is the truth

Mr. *Heathcote* hath charged Dr. P. (Reply p. 9.) with “ levelling “ a rancorous and malicious invective against the whole body of “ the clergy, but especially against the governors of the church ;” whom, as he is bound in duty, he holdeth in high esteem and reverence. But whether an imputation of injudicious officiousness at best, doth not indeed lie against the man, who affecteth to make his court to the great by the awkward compliment of crying out “ that *they* are levelled at” in a general description of enormities, — let others determine.

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of God, and that its commandments and doctrines are holy and just and good. The question is, how we are to recommend it to the acceptance of those to whom we preach it. We can both go thus far — we can boldly appeal to it's general end and purpose, the gracious purpose of saving mankind from endless misery. We can also both insist upon the excellency of it's *moral* doctrines^a, and shew how well they are calculated for promoting love, and peace, and godliness, and honesty amongst men. And in these points, we have the concurrent assent of numberless divines, who have written for asserting the divine origin of the Christian dispensation. They have expatiated, (and indeed how could they avoid it?) upon the excellency of those commands, to the practice of which it was their business to win mankind, and upon the adorable love of God in *calling us to this state of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

THUS far, I say, Mr. Heatbote and I hold on our way together. But here we are to part, and take different roads.

FOR, first, it is my assertion grounded upon the plain and express authority of scripture, and which the reader will find insisted on in the *Christian Apology* and it's *farther Illustration*, that

a "Many authors have, indeed, occasionally asserted the doctrines of Christianity to be highly worthy of God; but these expressions have been meant of it's *moral* doctrines, whose excellency is obvious to all, and were not intended to subject every procedure, every ordinance of God for the salvation of mankind to the verdict of the reason, i. e. the fluctuating opinions of Men." St. Pet. Ap. p. 75.

no man can truly comprehend the word of God but by the spirit of God: That in order to our real understanding the scriptures, *he* must “open our understandings”— That “the natural man” (with all his reasoning sagacity) “discerneth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he discern them because they are spiritually discerned”— And that the only *means* of discerning “the wondrous things of God’s law” is an effectual conversion of the heart to God, the simplicity and sincerity of little children, and the unfeigned repentance and humility of a soul earnestly desiring to be cleansed from it’s corruptions, and to listen with a submissive attention to the illuminating instructions of the heavenly teacher:— That the more earnestly we address ourselves in prayer to God, in this humble, penitent, converted state of heart, that he would “learn us true understanding and knowledge” in the holy scriptures, acknowledged and “believed for his commandments” upon the authority of divine miracles, the more will even the mysterious parts unfold themselves to our understandings; explained to us, “not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth;” the distant passages of scripture reciprocally reflecting light upon each other from a “comparing of spiritual things with spiritual:”— And that, according to this, which is no other than God’s own, account of the manner in which he giveth “knowledge of his Laws,” the *antecedent examination*

mination of these laws and doctrines, in order to discover their excellence, fitness and propriety, or their contrary qualities, that we may accordingly, on the credit of the miracles, embrace or reject them — this procedure, I say, is a gross infringement upon God's appointed order, who plainly intended *that*, upon the inducement of the miracles, we should believe ; submit ourselves to this acknowledged heavenly teacher, and so, should understand through an hearty desire to obey. But the reader hath seen that Mr. Heathcote is for proceeding on another, opposite plan. He will understand the scriptures *antece-*
dently to his acquiescence in the miracles as satisfactory credentials of a divine teacher ; and expressly brandeth the scripture-account of the blindness of the *natural man* to the things of God, as “*illiterate, unmeaning Cant*.”

THIS is the first difference between Mr. Heathcote and myself.

Secondly, THE infidel, who consenteth with us to the excellency of the general end proposed by the Christian dispensation, (allowing that it is a purpose worthy of God to save his creatures from eternal misery if he see them fallen into it,) and also to the excellency of the moral doctrines of the gospel, (agreeing that Jesus Christ was a man of excellent moral principles and character) this infidel, acknowledging that thus far all is right, will still farther insist, that this dispensation, notwithstanding its alledged miracles, may after all be an imposture — that not only

* Use of R. p. 81.

this or that part of the matter of revelation, must approve itself to the reason of him to whom it is offered, (since the absurdest and falsest systems have *some* articles in them which reason may subscribe to;) but, that *every branch and article* of it must be cleared up to him, and demonstrated to be consistent with those *natural notions* which God hath implanted in his breast, as the *touchstone of all truth*. He will then proceed to intimate his doubts and difficulties; he will touch upon many seeming absurdities in the scripture-account of man, and of his fall; of the Jews; of God incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ; of his attonement for sin; of the efficacy of his ordinances; of sanctification by the Holy Ghost, and of his Godhead, *one* with that of the father and the son — These articles, and many others connected with and resulting from them, must **ALL** be rationally explained to Him so as to be made appear to be consistent with the *first and simplest principles of common sense*. Let one seeming inconsistency remain unsolved, and that one, he will tell you, is a full justification of his unbelief: that, *malum ex quolibet defectu*, is an undeniable maxim, and that *not one jot or one tittle*, of a law pretended to come from God, must fail of approving itself to the reason of the subjects to whom it is proposed.

FOR “ whenever God shall condescend to reveal himself to man, he will certainly adapt himself to the human means of comprehending him, will deal with men as with rational creatures; and not contrive things so, that what

“ is

" is wisdom and goodness with him shall appear to be madness and folly to us ; since this would only be to reveal himself just enough to make us reject but not enough to make us receive him ".

SUCH will be the infidel's remonstrance ; and Mr. Heathcote will allow that it is well grounded, and that he justly suspendeth his assent to the gospel as a divine revelation, while any of his objections remain unanswered. For, " many religions (will he say) besides the jewish and christian have prevailed in the world under pretext of being revelations from heaven, and how does one know that those particular revelations which were ordained to abolish others, are indeed true and genuine revelations ? " — Nothing, " (will he add) can be known or received as a revelation from heaven, until it be tried and approved by that standard or measure of reason and common sense which God has appointed for our guide and director ." He will then desire the infidel to produce his objections ; and when, by the help of Mr. Heathcote's justifications, he confesseth that he now perceiveth the harmony and beauty and truth⁴ of the gospel-system, and the consistency of every branch and article of it with his own

a Reply p. 41. b P. 57. c P. 67. — " All Revelation (saith Mr. Heathcote again, p. 69.) by whomsoever founded, or from whomsoever derived, must submit to be examined at the tribunal of reason, before it can be received." d " This a miracle can do — it can prove a true doctrine to be a divine one—and this is it's use in establishing christianity." Reply p. 115.

apprehensions, with his *common sense and common notions*, — then, and no sooner will Mr. Heathcote begin to insist upon the *external evidence* of the *miracles*: But as the infidel's objections are numerous, and the debating upon them may probably generate new ones, occasioned by arbitrary suppositions, adduced for the solution of the original objections, the debate will be likely to make a very slow progress^a; it may not, nay it cannot be adjusted during the lives of the disputants, and the infidel will go out of the world *justified*, by Mr. Heathcote's concession, in his rejection of the gospel, though it have been proposed to him with *the whole evidence which God hath annexed to it*, and though *He* hath declared that the unbeliever (*ανισης*, he who hath rejected the gospel proposed to him) shall be *damned*^b.

THE author of the *Christian Apology* will proceed with the infidel after a different method. He will refer him to the miracles of Jesus Christ, attested as they are with a singular strength of evidence for a decisive proof of the divine origin of his doctrines: Miracles which no man could do except God were with Him, and which therefore demand that he who wrought them, as tokens that he was sent from God, and spake the truth of God, is to be implicitly believed and assented to, in all that he hath taught.

^a This may fairly be inferred from the considerable length of time which hath usually been employed by general councils, in settling a few articles. ^b Mar. 16. 16.

If the infidel remonstrate to this plea for the divine authority of the scriptures; if he object that the revelation-system abounding with absurdities and contradictions, and that many of its branches are irreconcileable with wisdom, justice and goodness^a, and demand to have his doubts and objections cleared up by rational disceptation, and shewn to be, in every branch and article, consistent with common sense and common notions; standing up for religious liberty by asserting the rights of reason^b — the true christian apologist will endeavour to convince him of the vanity of this demand, not by decrying human reason, or exploding the powers thereof, but by observing that this noble, vigorous, penetrating faculty of reason cannot, in the nature of things, exert itself to the purpose of acquiring real knowledge, without real ideas, that is, ideas of facts and realities; and that, with regard to the supernatural, mysterious doctrines of the gospel, and to a number of astonishing particulars in the history of the bible, we want that πληροΦεια, that full and adequate knowledge of facts or circumstances belonging to them, which is necessary to the accounting for them, and explaining their difficulties, and their seeming inconsistencies with the divine wisdom or justice or goodness — that to lay any stress upon these difficulties, as arguments against the truth of revelation, and to determine decisively on facts from a partial survey of their circumstances, is abusing and supplanting our reason, instead of assert-

a Reply p. 41.

b Reply p. 77.

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ing her rights, and is indeed a no more rational procedure, than if one should pretend to determine the amount of several sums contained in several columns of an account, from seeing only *one* of those columns; or should make objections to the contrivance of a complicated machine, from a survey of only *one* part of it. He will observe that there is no reason why we should not alledge the same plea in justification of God's *redeeming*, as we are wont to alledge in behalf of his *creating* and *preserving*, providence. The infidel, who by the very denomination of *deist* which he assumeth, acknowledgeth a God the *creator* of the world, and the watchful *preserver* of men, will readily acknowledge, nay, will strenuously maintain, that some seeming irregularities which appear in this world, are no arguments that *all* is not the handywork of a wise, and just, and benevolent God; and also, that the promiscuous distribution of good and evil among the sons of men, without any apparent regard to their several deservings, must yet be looked upon as wisely and kindly intended by the divine *œconomist*, though, when we would investigate these *ways of heaven*,

“THE eye of reason traces them in vain,
“Lost and bewilder'd in the fruitless search.”

WHY, then, the *Christian Apologist* will urge, must God be expected to open his *grounds and reasons*, and explain every thing which, to an uninformed observer, may seem harsh or inconsistent, in his counsels relating to the *redemption* of mankind, while we are contented, reverently to adore

dore the mysterious, unfathomable depths of his creation and providence?

“ Why charge we heaven in those, in these
“ acquit? ”

“ In both, to reason right is to submit.”

WILL you say, as Socinus and his followers affect to say, that man hath *a right to expect* a previous explanation, with regard to all the difficulties and seeming *inconsistencies with common notions* which the offered system shall labour with?

THIS plea would, indeed, be reasonable enough, if God were to receive benefit from the race of mankind in the redemption which he offereth. The party from which favour is expected may certainly insist upon it's own terms of accommodation. But shall poor condemned captives, who *sit in darkness and the shadow of death* make terms with their deliverer? Is it not enough that this deliverer work *signs and wonders, that they may believe him able to perform what he hath promised?*

Now this is truly the case of mankind with regard to Jesus Christ, who offereth himself to be their Saviour from *bondage, and the fear of death,*^a and who is *demonstrated to be from God*^b, (whose power alone is adequate to this great work,) by *miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him.* To demand, that the process by which this deliverance is to be wrought, be

^a Heb. 2. 15.

^b Από Θεού αναδιδούμενός εστιν. Acts 2. 22.

antece-

antedecedently explained to us, or reconciled to human apprehensions of things, what is this but the height of arrogance and ingratitude? And is it not a sufficient reply to this demand, that God hath not thought fit to unravel and lay before us an account of his plan in all its parts, (which, possibly might, after all, contain many *apparita puerata*, which human language could not convey to our present conceptions) and that therefore it is vanity and rash judging to pronounce peremptorily concerning those several parts of this plan, which he hath not explained to us; or to undertake to reconcile, from our *partial information*, those seeming inconsistencies which only a *full knowledge* of facts can enable us to solve: Since, "even in human affairs," into which one is likely to see farther than into the divine œconomy, "he who hath been admitted behind the curtain, shall clearly and rationally justify transactions, which, to a wiser man, who is ignorant of the springs and motives and procedure of them, shall appear to be downright madness and folly." But that if we will be contented to acknowledge Christ Jesus on the authority of his own offered credentials, with full assurance of faith, and submit our understanding, with humble reverence to the instructions of "the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it feeth him not, neither knoweth him;" if, perswaded that Christ "hath the words of eternal life, we come to him that we may be

a St. Pet. Ap. p. 3, 4.

"saved,"

“ saved,” and meditate upon his law with the anxious solicitude of wretched, blind, distressed, lost creatures who earnestly pray to be “ delivered out of darkness and the shadow of death, “ and to be guided into the way of peace” — then shall we see and know, that we had all along sought for the true, salutary meaning of the scriptures in a method in which they have assured us it is never to be found ; that no proud, presumptuous, world-polluted sinner, however he may critically speculate the scriptures, doth indeed “ see them with his eyes and hear them “ with his ears, and understand them with his “ heart, so as to be converted, and healed : ” in a word, that such a knowledge of scripture as availeth unto salvation, is attained only by those who ask for his ordinances “ that they may hear “ them and do them.”

INFIDEL. ALL this talk must pass for nothing with me who do not acknowledge the truth of scripture. But the first part of your defence with which alone I am concerned, is excellent ! “ You *contrast*, (by which I mean, *compare*) “ your revelation with human transactions which “ have the appearance of madness and folly, and “ contend all the while for it’s being divine.”

P. Dear Sir, you have forgotten already, *to whom* it is that these human transactions have this appearance ; it is to a man who is ignorant of those circumstances, from which alone a just judgment can be formed. Doth such a Person’s opinion at all impeach the wisdom of those

transactions, whose management he censureth? And when you and other unbelievers presume to charge the mysterious doctrines, or partially-known facts of the bible, with absurdity, injustice, madness, folly, what do you expose but your own *rash judgment*? Be contented with knowing only as much of these as God hath thought fit to communicate to mankind; and be perswaded that a fuller knowledge of these several facts, would make your seeming absurdities vanish.—You see I leave the *excellent faculty of reason* in full possession of all her powers: it is not to any *weakness of reason*, but to the *biddleness of facts* that I ascribe the false judgments of those, who undertake to judge without proper and sufficient *data*. If reason had the ken of an angel, she could not see farther into those *things which the angels desire to look into*, than God hath permitted her; and should these enlightened beings themselves pretend to pronounce concerning the things which are hid from them, they too, with all their transcendent vigour of intellect, must undergo the imputation of *rash, mistaken judgment*.

INF. AND so, my good Doctor, you are pleased to refer me to certain "*future facts*, "which, when revealed, are to solve all objections, *smoothen* all inequalities, and make that appear fit, and reasonable, and wise, and just, and good, which now appears, in your own account, so very much otherwise:" but "what grounds have you offered for their reality? or that any such facts will ever be revealed? are they

" they not merely hypothetical, a downright
 " begging of the question? Yes they are —
 " besides, this method of supporting the divini-
 " ty of the bible, will support just as well the
 " divinity of the koran."^a

CHRISTIAN. I have referred you, Sir, to no *future facts*: all I have said of *facts* is, that you know not those that belong to the bible compleatly enough to pronounce decisively and certainly concerning the fitness, propriety, justice &c. of many of them; and if *Christ crucified* be to you, as he was to the rash-reasoning *Greeks, foolishness*, it is because you judge of the *matter* of revelation in all it's parts, with the same decisive confidence, with which you are wont to judge concerning those matters whose facts and circumstances lie evident before you; and not with that humble deference of faith, to the *assurance given by God to all men*, which leadeth the humble disciples of Christ to acknowledge him to be *the power of God and the wisdom of God*. What I have referred you to, is the *evidence of divine miracles*, to evince that the facts contained in the revelation-system are of God, and that therefore, (not on account of any *future facts*) you are to receive and embrace them as fit, and just, and good; though you cannot, as you say, now perceive them to be so, but think them to be just the contrary.

INF. THESE *miracles* of yours, my Friend, will not serve your turn. I can refer you to a book that *will tell you, and will prove it too*, that

^a Reply, p. 39, 40.

if you would confirm the divinity of a religion by the authority of miracles, you must first prove it's doctrines to be *true*^a; when this is done, then miracles will prove them to be *divine*, but otherwise, these *miracles must be content to pass for very wild and incredible facts*, as their *contrariety to all our experience* will be an unanswerable reason for rejecting them.

CHRISTIAN. I find you are determined to strike at the credibility of all miracles whatsoever. The *truth of doctrines*, though ever so evident, would not render the miracles alledged to attest them, a whit the more credible, *upon your plan*. — Let me offer some reasons —

INF. I must be excused at present, being already too late, I fear, for the *Robin Hood*. But if you are for debating this point, you must give me leave to put my cause into the hands of an advocate who understands it better than I pretend to do, though I understand *him* very well, and highly approve of what he has said upon the subject. I often tell him he ought fairly to declare himself one of us, for he fights for the very same principles that have made me a deist. He admits nothing in religion, on the credit of external evidence, but what has passed the standard of reason; nor I neither. My reason shall see the consistency of every proposition and every tale in the bible, with common sense; I will have the *grounds and reasons* of what you call revelation, so explained to me that no tokens may remain in it of *arbitrariness, caprice*

^a Reply, p. 115.

and

and *fantastic humour*,^a before I will believe a tittle of the whole to come from God. Mr. Heathcote, for that is my friend's name, tells me, indeed, that *so far* as he can prove the wisdom and goodness of pretended revelation, *he hath an indisputable claim to my assent*, since he proves at least that it *may be* a revelation; and so, makes proper way for the miracles; but I laugh, and tell him he can prove no such thing; that I have a thousand particulars to alledge against this *may-be* he talks of, *which will, I imagine, always keep me the deist I profess myself*. Instead of converting me, he has supplied me with armour, which is proof against all conversion. He has authorized me to say, that the miracles of the gospel are, in themselves, no proofs of it's divine origin; and the circumstances, under which alone they can, according to him, be valid proofs, are such as my reason assures me can never happen; that is, that every part of the bible shall *appear* not only *consistent with reason*, but also *conformable to truth*.^b

[Exit, triumphing and insulting.^c

Mr. Heathcote's infidel hath now triumphed over both of us;^d which of his two triumphs is best founded, the reader will determine. I would, indeed, freely leave to *his* decision, every particular article of this debate, and refer him to *St. Peter's Christian Apology* for a full answer

^a Use of R. p. 61.

^b "This a miracle can do; it can prove a *true* doctrine to be a *divine one* — and this is it's use in establishing christianity." p. 115. ^c Reply, p. 42. ^d See Reply, p. 42. to

to the *Reply* to it, if he would be pleased regularly to examine for himself the citations which Mr. *Heathcote* pretendeth to have made from the sermon and it's defence.

WITH regard to these citations, I must here renew my charge of gross misrepresentation against him. The first law of disputation, *which I profess to have religiously observed*, is to stick to the terms of the question, and of the several propositions which emerge in the course of the debate: and he who will give himself the unfair liberty of 1. altering some of his adversary's expressions; and 2. leaving out others; and 3. bringing passages together, from wide distances, representing them as one and the same continued sentence, all which I charge upon Mr. *Heathcote*; this man may indeed contrive, by these arts, (but he must employ them with more address than Mr. *Heathcote* hath done) to obtain a victory^a, but then it will be a victory over his own phantom; his real antagonist will remain unhurt.

I shall now proceed to examine Mr. *Heathcote's* second effort to invalidate the doctrine of the *Christian Apology*, set forth in the sermon and

a Mr. *Heathcote's* misrepresentations are frequently, (as the reader will soon perceive who is disposed to convince himself) a jumble of these three contrivances, any one of which is able with any tolerable management to secure the victory here spoken of. By the last of them, for instance, how easily might one prove to Mr. *Heathcote* from the express words of scripture the lawfulness, nay the duty of self-murder? v. g.

Judas went and hanged himself, go and do thou likewise.

Matt, 27. 3,5. Luke 10. 37.

it's *farther illustration*; promising the reader to detain him very little upon points which do not tend either to invalidate my adversary's arguments, or set forth his real skill in reasoning. His "quotations quoted from quotations," unless they appear to be of real importance to the point in debate, shall be passed over with

"IT may be so, but we proceed."

THIS sticking on of shreds and patches, however purple and shining, will, in the present case prove nothing else, but a nakedness which wanted covering, joined to a ridiculous affectation of finery.

I. IN Mr. Heathcote's *first* argument against the decisiveness of miracles as a proof of a revelation, he had insisted upon the necessity of certain *antecedent notions*. "In order to know and "embrace a revelation," saith he, "we must "previously be endued with powers which are "capable of understanding what it sets forth, "and of comprehending the *terms* in which it is "conceived." This was readily allowed: "no "revelation can be made to beings incapable of "understanding it so far as it shall be communicated."^b But though Mr. Heathcote's proposition spoke only of the *terms* of the revelation, his illustration plainly implied that he meant to speak of the *articles* of the revelation; "Thus, "if," saith he, "a revelation treateth of matters "which relate to the being of a God — I must

^a Use of R. p. 27.

^b St. Pet. Apol. p. 34.

"previously

"previously know that such a being exists" — To know that God existeth, is surely the knowledge of something more than the meaning of the term God; it is plainly, the knowledge of the article itself. And it was the *wildness and absurdity* of this position that I endeavoured to expose by some parallel instances. One of them relateth to the everblessed Trinity, and the reader is entreated to do me the justice to cast his eye over the 34th page of *St. Peter's Chr. Apol.* that he may convince himself of the gross falsehood of Mr. Heathcote's assertion, that "our Doctor has plainly discovered from the hint here dropped, that he looks upon this mystery of the three persons as a flat contradiction to reason, and which cannot be received upon the principles thereof." ^b

2. MR. Heathcote, in order to demonstrate "that the scriptures themselves suppose the principles of natural religion to be already known," had alledged the authority of St. Paul in that much-debated passage concerning the intimation which God hath given to men of *his eternal power and Godhead by the things that are made*. Whether it is to be inferred from this passage *that the natural powers of man are capable of investigating the being and attributes of God from*

^a Use of R. p. 27.

^b Reply, p. 45.

^c Use of R. p. 30. Mr. Heathcote hath in his Reply, p. 47, represented his attempt in this part of the *Use of R.* to have been, to prove that it "appears from the scriptures themselves that previously to the reception of revelation, we must know the terms of which the articles of it are compounded." What must his adversary expect, if he thus misrepresent himself?

the works of the creation ; or whether it's meaning be " that these visible things are standing, awakening memorials and images of heavenly things, even his eternal power and godhead," the reader, when he hath considered Mr. Heathcote's and my account, will judge for himself. I shall only observe upon this occasion, that however Mr. Heathcote's strong antipathy to *Socinus*^a might prejudice him against my interpretation of this text, (which that author hath interpreted in the same manner) it might yet, have somewhat mitigated his dislike if he had known, that his friend *Origen*, to whose writings he hath more than once triumphantly appealed, is on my side^b.

3. On occasion of this text, Mr. Heathcote hath given us a fashionable, learned dissertation of seven pages ; enquiring whether or no the Greeks profited by the Jews in their knowledge of divine things ; but as he hath closed it with determining, that it is a point which there is not light enough in antiquity to settle precisely, and which does not affect the question he is defending^c,

^a He hath remarked, with a sort of triumph, (Reply p. 49.) that the construction adopted by me is that of *Socinus*, who is rebuked very sharply for it by Pearson. But the greatest geniuses are liable to oscitancy. Mr. Heathcote utterly forgot his antipathy to that arch infidel, when in the 167th page of his Reply he ranketh *Socinianism* amongst imaginary evils. " Here we may learn, saith he, by a striking example whither that zeal against *Socinianism* and OTHER IMAGINARY evils would carry men."

^b See a fine contemplation upon this passage of St. Paul, in *Origen's 3 Homil. in Cantic.*

^c Reply p. 56.

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c Reply p. 56.

I am certainly excused, as he might have been, from losing time in considering this point.

4. His next thirteen pages are employed in discussing a question, which will here, I hope, be dismissed in one, viz. Whether, if *Jesus Christ came*, as he did according to Mr. *Heathcote*, to give sight to those who, through the fall, were spiritually blind; whether I say these blind could be said to have any principles remaining, in this darkness of their understanding, to be, as this gentleman would have them, a foundation and support of revealed religion?

And after a deal of explaining, limiting, illustrating, exemplifying, behold the determination which he hath fixed upon! "By my natural powers I may be able to pass a judgment upon christianity, to explode it if be false, or to confirm it if it be true, though I owe the strength and management of these powers solely to the culture of this religion".

The reader will probably ask, first, how a religion which is here supposed to have evinced a divine efficacy in restoring and invigorating our natural powers, can, even in supposition, be exploded as false? secondly he may ask, whether the natural powers can be supposed to receive their sight and culture from the revelation of Jesus Christ, until it have been firmly and faithfully assented to? If not, then the judgment which these natural powers are to pass upon christianity will come too late for Mr. *Heathcote's* purpose, who maintaineth this judgment to be antecedent^b

a Reply p. 65.

b Reply p. 69.

to the reception of the gospel.—Such will always be the confusion and embarrassment of unnatural refinements! But if we will be guided by truth and nature, then, let us permit *reason* to pronounce whether the doctrine be from God, but let her take, as her *proper and sufficient test* of it's divinity, the *miracles* which Jesus Christ expressly stileth, in appealing to them, the *works of his father.*

AND when the doctrines have been first, on the authority of the miracles, implicitly admitted for divine, “the man who is disposed to do “God's will,” being instructed by the spirit of truth, “shall *know* them to be so” from that wonderful excellence which shall then shine forth in them.

BUT Mr. Heathcote's test will come, we see by his own account, *too late* to be applied; if there were not a multitude of other objections against it.

5. WHAT he calleth his *second argument* to establish *the foundation of natural religion to revealed*^a, was, indeed, in St. Peter's *Cbr. Apol.* dismissed, as he complaineth, without any farther notice, than it's being called *a flourishing of his pen in the air*; for, in truth, it is no argument, but a *question*, supported by an arbitrary proposition. He asketh, “How shall we distinguish true religion from false, and divine revelation from a human imposture?” And *He maketh answer unto himself*; “why, by the use and application of our natural powers”^b—The

a Reply p. 70.

b Use of R. p. 36.

Christian apology answereth, "Why, by the
"gospel-miracles: there is but one divine reve-
"lation, and these are it's evidences, established
"by the revealer himself." Is not this *Why*, at
least as good as Mr. Heathcote's, while the pro-
position introduced by it remaineth only a bare
assertion?

6. THE author of *St. Pet. Apol.* having all along maintained that the authority of miracles is *decisive* for establishing the divine origin of the gospel, thought it material to his point to observe, that the messengers of both God's written revelations, established the divinity of their several commissions *wholly upon the credentials of miracles*^a; concluding that if miracles do *wholly establish* the divinity of a commission, then the *matter* of this commission is to be implicitly, and without examination, received for divine.

MR. Heathcote, compelled by my short history of *Moses* his miracles to admit my proposition, hath, to get rid of the consequences of it, in an instant,

(*Quo teneam vultus mutantem Protea nodo?*) changed the original question between us. "All, " saith he, that I denied or ever meant to deny "was that miracles could *not* stamp divinity up- "on absurd and contradictory doctrines^b." Against what then, or whom have his two books been directed? If against the *Christian Apology* and its *farther illustration*, then, (supposing his particle *not* to be redundant) he must produce, and he is challenged to produce, some one pas-

a St. Pet. Chr. Ap. p. 21.

b Reply p. 80.

sage,

sage at least, in, at least, one of them, which affirmeth, *That miracles CAN stamp divinity upon absurd and contradictory doctrines.*

They have both, indeed, all along asserted, that "the miracles of the gospel," (for with these alone they are concerned) "attested, as they are, with a singular strength of evidence"; "do stamp divinity upon it's doctrines." But Mr. Heathcote's assertion ^a can stand in no opposition to this, unless he will affirm that *the doctrines of the gospel are absurd and contradictory.*

His argument must stand thus,

DR. Patten asserts that the miracles of the gospel stamp divinity upon it's doctrines, but

"Miracles cannot stamp divinity upon absurd and contradictory doctrines,

"Therefore his assertion is false."

If you deny his consequence, he must support it by asserting, that

"The doctrines of the gospel are absurd and contradictory.

In Mr. Heathcote's next page ^b he accuseth his adversary of jumbling two ideas into one, which are manifestly different, viz. "the external evidence of a revelation," and "what may be called it's test;" miracles having been stiled, in St. Pet. Chr. Ap. *the test of revelation.*

^a Including those of the old testament which are confirmed by the divine authority of the new.

^b See St. Pet. Chr. Ap. p. 3.46.

^c That "Miracles cannot stamp divinity upon absurd and contradictory doctrines."

^d P. 81.

TEST, a chemical term, is the name of a sort of earthen vessel used for fusing metals in furnaces; and to *put to the test* is, in it's primary signification, to try a metalline substance in the fire, whether it will exhibit the specific properties of the metal to whose class it outwardly seemeth to belong. From hence the term *test* hath been transferred to signify a token or sign whereby we may prove, whether a thing be or be not what it pretendeth^a.

Let us ask Mr. Heathcote then, what other *test*, sign, or token can be applied to, for proving that a doctrine is from God, but this *external evidence of miracles?* *Conformity to common sense and common notions* is certainly no such *test*, as this conformity can only, in Mr. Heathcote's own account, prove that the doctrine *may be* from God. This gentleman hath therefore here presented us with what is called *a distinction without a difference.*

WE must not dismiss this article relating to the commission of *Moses* and *Aaron* to the *Israelites*, without pleading to a heavy accusation brought against me by Mr. Heathcote, who hath on this occasion, discharged a page of *his own* artillery upon me. What a volley is here of *disguising, littleness, narrow-mindedness, bigotry, lying, misrepresentation, pious fraud, absurdity*^b! I do not, indeed, feel myself hurt, but let us see whether I am really safe or not: One is some-

a Our Legislature had evidently this idea of the word in their view in the denomination fixed on one of our acts of Parliament.

b Reply p. 83.

times so stunned by a shot from a — cannon; as not to perceive the wound immediately. To quit the allegory — I am charged ^a with having disguised, altered, misrepresented, the history of those *miracles upon whose credentials the divine commission of Moses was wholly established*, having asserted, on the authority of Exod. 4. 29, 30, 31. that the people believed “upon the confirmation “of miracles which they *did not see*, and which “the *Elders*, who were the *only eye-witnesses*, “*reported* ^b.”

My answer to this grievous accusation is two-fold.

FIRST, I will appeal to any reader of plain understanding, whether it be not exactly the same thing to my argument, whether the miracles were *seen by* or *reported to* the people. The proposition to be proved was “that *Moses* establish-“ed the divinity of his commission wholly upon “the credentials of miracles” — *seen*, or *report-
ed*, make no part of it. If *all* believed upon these credentials, whether seen or reported, the proposition hath its full proof. The circumstance of the people’s *believing on report* is evidently, to those who will see, a circumstance thrown in *ex abundanti*, and not required by the argument.

BUT why, it may be asked, was a circumstance thrown in, whether *necessary* or *abundant*, which is not warranted by the sacred text? I answer

SECONDLY, That I submit it to the judgment of the same plain understanding of the reader,

a P. 82.

b St. Pet. Chr. Ap. p. 18. and Reply p. 82.
whether

whether this circumstance be not, indeed, warranted both by the *sacred text*, and by the *nature of the thing*.

1. THE text relateth, that “*Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the ELDERS of the children of Israel.* And *Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses*, and did the signs *in the sight of the people*.—What can be more evident, than that the words were spoken and the signs done before those, and those *only*, who were called together to hear and see them? At least it appeared thus to me; especially as

2. THE nature of the thing forbiddeth us to suppose that the signs *could* be exhibited in the sight of *all*, or indeed of any more than a comparatively small part of the people. To give *six hundred thousand men* a sight of the signs here spoken of^a, while *Aaron* was performing them, would be as extraordinary a miracle as any of them. And it is remarkable, that two of them at least, were *transient acts*^b, of which no token remained afterwards, by which they who did not *see* these acts, might convince themselves that they *had been* performed: so that the vast multitude of those who were not, who could not without a miracle be eye-witnesses, *could have*

^a Exod. 4---2---9.

^b The three signs were, 1. The changing a rod into a serpent, and that into a rod again. 2. A sudden leprosy brought upon the hand, and then suddenly removed. 3. The turning of water into blood by pouring it upon the dry land.

no other evidence of them than the bare report of the Elders^a.

MR. Heathcote will therefore probably be thought, upon the whole, to have been somewhat too severe in his charge of *misrepresentation, pious fraud, lying &c. &c. &c.*

The decisive authority of *miracles* was pleaded for, 2dly, from the procedure of *Jesus Christ*, who, as I alledged, *established the divinity of his commission wholly upon these credentials*^b. Not offering his *doctrines* to be previously examined, but appealing absolutely to this *seal of his commission* from heaven.

IN proof of this assertion, four declarations of our blessed Saviour were produced^c. Mr. Heathcote, in replying to this argument, hath dropped two of these texts, and saith of the other two that “they are not strong enough for the purpose of proving, that Jesus rested the divinity

^a The number of those who were, strictly speaking, eye-witnesses, of the miracles of our blessed Saviour must, as in the case before us, have been small in proportion to that of the great multitudes that followed him. Most of his miracles were indeed imminent acts, whose effects remained, and were examinable after his agency had ceased, but still the conviction of those who thus examined them, was necessarily to result from testimony. --- This reflection may lead us to admire the wisdom of God in appointing chosen witnesses who should constantly attend and be eye-witnesses of those miracles, which few, in the nature of the thing, could know but by report: And also the wisdom of our Saviour's declaration, “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”

^b St. Pet. Apol. p. 21.

^c Search the scriptures --- they --- testify of me. John 5. 39.
The works that I do in my father's name they bear witness of me.

Believe me --- or else believe me for the work's sake. John 14. 11.
If ye believe not me, believe the works. John 10. 38.

"of his commission on miracles, without con-
"descending to appeal to reason".

OUR author hath not shewn us what his reasonings were; he had, we are told, been *baranguing* the Jews openly, and his disciples in private: "he had been endeavouring to perswade "the Jews that he was the *Messiah*, and to confirm his disciples in that persuasion: but perceiving that his arguments had not wrought in them the conviction he aimed at; that the former persisted still in their unbelief, and that the latter were not without their doubts, he desires them to believe in him for the sake of "his miracles".

Now if the reader will be pleased to consult these two passages, he will find that in the first of them, (John. 10. 38.) with its context, our Saviour did indeed reason with the Jews, and that his reasoning standeth thus,

"The Father hath sanctified and sent me into
"the world," Therefore
"I do not blaspheme in saying I am the son
"of God."

AND then, for a proof of his *antecedent* proposition — that they may believe that *the father hath thus sanctified him*, — he appealeth to his miracles, *the works of his father*. "I tell you "that I am the son of God, but if ye believe "not me, believe the *works*."

HIS reasoning then, in this passage will not serve Mr. Heathcote's purpose, being exactly the same with that which is all along urged in the

^a Reply p. 85.

^b Ibid.

Christian and St. Peter's Apology; “the works
“bear witness to the worker, that he is, what
“he declared himself, the son of God. Behold
“the fortrefs, erected by the captain himself of
“our salvation, of *a Christian's reasoning*^a!”

As to the other passage addressed by our blessed Saviour “to his disciples when *alone*,” (John 14. 11.) the reader will find his whole discourse in that chapter to this 11th verse, to be merely *authoritative assertion*. The eleventh verse runneth thus — “believe ME, that I am in the fa-
“ther and the father in me; but if not, believe
“me for the very WORK'S SAKE.” We see not, throughout, the least glimpse of reasoning, - besides this *appeal to his miracles*, as proofs of the truth of his declaration. And this kind of reasoning I am so far from *precluding*, that I have suffered all this obloquy from Mr. Heathcote for *recommending* it.

BUT should it ever appear from these passages that our blessed Saviour reasoned agreeably to Mr. Heathcote's own plan, and entered upon a formal examination of the *matter* of his doctrines in *all* their branches and articles, in order to convince the Jews and his disciples that they *might be a divine revelation, for any thing that reason urges to the contrary*^b; yet would this very example be found, even in his own representation of it, utterly to overturn his whole plan. According to this *plan*, *reasonings upon the matter* of the gospel-doctrines are to be applied, which may demonstrate it to be, throughout, consistent

^a Christ. Apol. p. 29.

^b Use of R. p. 40.

with our *notions*; and if these reasonings fail of giving this demonstration, miracles will in vain lay claim to our assent. — But according to the supposed *example* before us, *first*, reasonings may be applied for the cure of doubters and unbelievers, and *secondly*, when this faileth, we may compel them, as it were, by an appeal to facts^a.

INFIDELES may perhaps begin, for the first time, to frown upon Mr. Heathcote, for giving this decisive, *compulsive authority* to miracles, even “when reasonings fail to convince.” But let them read on and he will pacify them in this very 86th page, by telling them from Chrysostom, interpreted by himself, “that men of reasoning “and enlarged understandings, have no occasion “for miracles.” And to give them farther satisfaction, he shall undertake in the next page but one, to prove in flat contradiction to what he had awhile before affirmed concerning the *compulsive power of miracles when reasonings fail to convince*, he shall, I say, undertake to prove “from the clearest principles of common sense, “that the miracles recorded in the old and new “testament cannot demand an implicit assent in “spite of (or rather, *superseding*^b,) all *antecedent* “reasonings concerning fitness, probability,

a “He --- *first*, saith Mr. Heathcote, endeavoured to persuade “them by applying such topics as were proper to each, and, *se- condly*, when this failed, to compel them as it were, by an ap- “peal to facts.” Reply p. 86.

b This is my word in the passage here pretended to be cited from my book, p. 22.

c My expression is—“do altogether supersede all abstract spe- culations, all reasonings *a priori* concerning &c.

“ grounds

"grounds &c. For," addeth he, "if they could,
"then a miracle, recorded there to convince me
"that *two and three make six*, must be of the
"same force and efficacy as if it was only to
"convince me that *two and three make five*;
"since, where all reasoning is entirely out of the
"question, a miracle must equally confirm all
"doctrines."

THIS argument resteth upon (what Logicians
stile *non supponendum*) a supposition which cannot
be made, viz. that a miracle could be recorded
in the bible to convince us of manifest, gross
absurdities.

THE power of changing the course of nature
is certainly in the hands of the God of nature;
and though he may, on various occasions, have
delegated this power to inferior agents, yet, that
this GOD OF TRUTH should grant it for the
purpose of *convincing us of a gross falsehood*, is a
case no more to be supposed, than *that two and
three can make six*.

THE only passage in scripture that can, with
any sort of colour, be alledged in support of Mr.
Heathcote's supposition, is that in Deut. 13. 1, &c.
where a *sign* or *wonder* given by a prophet or a
dreamer of dreams for the purpose of enticing to
idolatry, is supposed to come to pass.

BUT it is evident, from the circumstances of
this case, that the *sign* or *wonder* must be suppo-
sed to come to pass without any miraculous fore-
knowledge, conferred on the prophet or the
dreamer, for the purpose of deceiving. He is
commanded

commanded to be put to death^a for his attempt; and can we even conceive that God should command this punishment to be inflicted on one who, by his own inspiration, either immediate or mediate, had foretold a future event? or can we conceive that God, who *cannot deny himself*, should, by a miraculous power conferred, authorize a prophet to *convince* his people of the *rectitude of idolatry*, when the great purpose of Moses his legation was to convince them of the *falsehood of it*? No; the purpose of God in this case, is expressly pronounced to be, that God doth *prove*^b or *try* his people, by making the event to correspond to the prediction, that is, by an *equivocal* miracle, (for many things foretold may easily come to pass without one) whether for the sake of it, they will give up the worship and fear of him, who hath asserted his claim to their service, by a continued series of astonishing, awful, *indisputable* exertions of divine power.

7. WE are now come to Mr. Heathcote's five arguments against the validity of the gospel-miracles, as absolute proofs of the divine mission of him who appealed to them for this purpose. And I shall leave it, for the most part, to the judgment of the publick, to determine whether he hath, in this new performance, freed those arguments from the charge I have endeavoured to maintain against them, of confusedness, mistake, inconclusiveness, false and arbitrary assertion &c. All I request of the reader, who is disposed to take the trouble of attending to this

debate is, that he would not, either here, or in any other part of Mr. Heathcote's book, take it for granted that this gentleman hath truly represented either himself or his adversary, but would examine every citation as he goeth along. It is easy for one who is really beaten to make a shew of fighting on, by wheeling about and shifting his ground, and avoiding the close combat. I will however take notice of every thing here advanced by him that seemeth to affect the point in question.

8. MR. Heathcote having retracted^a his strange assertion, "That there are *Pagan and Popish* "miracles upon record, as well attested as any "matters of fact *can possibly* be," I have no farther concern with it, than to smile at the earnestness wherewith he hath contended for it, even after he hath given it up; and at the idle sophism by which he attempteth to invalidate my plea for the *singularly superior strength of evidence* of the gospel-miracles; This plea was, "that, *first*, their historians were all eye-witnesses of most of them; and *secondly*, renounced this world and all its joys and promises, and underwent a series of cruel persecutions, and even death itself, in adhering to the facts they had attested—These joint circumstances, I have said^b, make up that *singular strength of evidence* of the gospel-miracles, which no other testimony of facts can parallel.

In order to *weaken* this *strength*, — as to the "first," faith Mr. Heathcote, "were not the mi-

^a Reply p. 94.

^b St. Pet. Ap. p. 46.

"racles

"racles of the Abbé Paris, recorded by an historian who was an eye-witness of many of them?" — And *secondly*, "have there not been christians in every age — who have died or been ready to die for their religion?" This sophism by which he hath imposed upon himself, is what is termed the *fallacy of disjunction*, and is then sought to be imposed, when we endeavour to overthrow our adversary's proposition by separating those circumstances, on whose junction the truth of that proposition is founded.

THUS, were I to assert that the *singular* merit of *Sallust* as an historian, consisteth in the *joint-circumstances* of conciseness and perspicuity: Mr. *Heathcote* might, in his way, totally over-turn my assertion by alledging that, *first*, *Livy* may vye with *Sallust* in *perspicuity*, and *secondly*, *Thucydides*, in *conciseness*.

BUT when he can produce a number of eye-witnesses to any other facts, equal to that of the witnesses of the gospel-miracles, who have undergone a series of cruel persecutions, and even death itself, in adhering to their attestation of those facts; we will then allow that the *strength of evidence* to the gospel-miracles is not *singular*, nor superior to all other evidence of facts that have been any where recorded.

9. IN support of the validity of *this* evidence, it was asserted in *St. Peter's Christian Apology*, that "the credibility of facts asserted, is measured by the credibility of the witnesses attesting those facts, and by that only." This, Mr.

a St. Pet. Apol. p. 44.

Heathcote hath flatly contradicted, and hath vilified *this doctor* for asserting it^a. In opposition to it, he hath affirmed, that “let the lives and characters of witnesses be what they will, their testimony must finally be determined by the nature of the facts they attest ; and will ever obtain more or less credit with men, as those facts are more or less conformable to observation and experience.” This proposition lately advanced by Mr. Hume^b, is by Mr. Heathcote endeavoured to be made good by the case of the miraculous interposition of witches, than which “there is not,” saith he, “in all history a fact better attested”— yet, in spite of all this force of human testimony, the strangeness of the thing, and its remoteness from the regular course of nature, have at length prevailed so

^a “Surely,” saith he, “no assertion was ever more confidently or more falsely made ; and it requireth the greatest charity in the world to believe that this doctor’s judgment, weak as it is, did not give his conscience the lye when he made it.” Reply p. 162.

^b Reply p. 102, 3.

^c Essay on Miracles.

d May not one justly suspect that what hath exploded the belief of the reality of witchcraft, was not the strangeness of the thing, but the weakness and insufficiency of the evidence by which it was attested. Strength, indeed, of asseveration was not wanting in these cases, but the evidence seemeth to have been generally defective for proving that the strange fact proceeded from the person accused for a witch upon account of it. Our ancestors, lying under a strong prepossession, were wont hastily to condemn the accused, without giving due attention to this important question; “Do these facts, thus strongly attested, appear, from this evidence, to have the accused for their author?” Noe enquiry frequently traced them to other authors, and shewed them to be cheats.

"far, that the existence of witches is now no longer believed."

THE *christian* reader will probably begin to tremble for the fate of the gospel-miracles, if this *conformity to observation and experience* be really the *criterion of the credibility* of attested facts. For, if the *strangeness* of witchcrafts, and their *remoteness from the regular course of nature* be the true and just cause why they have been "ranked "among fables and chimera's," then, the miracles of the gospel, being at least equally *strange*, and equally *remote from the regular course of nature*, will, with equal justice be (as the writer mentioned above, hath, *for this very reason*, insinuated that they ought to be) disbelieved, and ranked among fables and chimera's.

ACCORDING to this doctrine, no human testimony can render credible a miraculous fact, as it hath in itself *a root of incredibility*, which no force of evidence can eradicate.

THUS is this unfortunate, incautious gentleman fallen, unawares, into the toils; into a principle of fundamental, essential infidelity; nor is it possible for him, consistently with this principle, to assent to the miracles of the gospel, as real facts.

HE hath often, indeed, asserted on this occasion that though "miracles, — considered distinctly from ends and doctrines, will lose all "their credit and authority by ceasing to be believed as real facts, yet when such ends and

■ Reply p. 103.

"doctrines

"doctrines are found *true*^a and worthy of God,
"the proof of their divinity is compleated by
"miracles^b.

BUT he hath urged, he can urge nothing in proof of this assertion. For if miraculous facts are *incredible in their very nature*, or, *because of their disconformity to experience*, let common sense determine, whether their being appealed to in proof of the divine authority of the most evident truth that can be conceived, doth at all *change their nature*, give them *a conformity to experience*, and render them credible.

10. MUCH is said in this latter part of Mr. Heathcote's book, but little or nothing of argumentative. Whenever a *reason* is wanted to support his positions, some friendly, arbitrary *quotation*^c shall step in, and save him from his distress. But as a question in dispute doth not de-

a The reader may, perhaps, be disheartned at the task here imposed upon him by Mr. Heathcote, who requireth that he should *find*, not only the *worthiness, fitness &c.* but the *truth* of doctrines, before the evidence of miracles is to be admitted: But let him turn to the 63d page of our author's *reply*, and he will find, to his great comfort, that *truth* is not so difficult a thing to *find*, as hath been imagined, but is, indeed, *self evident*; for that "it cannot be otherwise but that there must needs be some "natural affinity between truth and the understanding; something "in the mind of man so corresponding to truth, that he *shall always know it as soon as he sees it*, and be able to distinguish it "from every false appearance that mimicks it."

b Reply p. 119.

c Mr. Heathcote having quoted a long passage from Dr. Ellis (Reply p. 119, 20, 21.) in favour of his own doctrine, and having insinuated that this authority ought to be decisive with me, the reader is desired to take notice, that I have not once mentioned that author, nor cited a line from him, either in the *sermon* or its *illustration*.

pend upon authority and opinion, being decideable only by the nature of the thing; the judicious reader will never suffer him, on the strength of a quotation, to boast of a victory, when he hath, in truth, only made his escape, like *Paris*, in a cloud^a.

HAVING now considered all his doctrines, if they may be called so, concerning miracles, I will beg leave to sum up my own sentiments upon this subject, which will demonstrate how widely many of his cavils have been misdirected.

FIRST then, let it be remembered, that the *miracles* whose validity I am alone concerned to maintain, are those recorded in the gospel; miracles attested with a singular strength of evidence^b; and expressly appealed to in confirmation of it's doctrines.

SECONDLY that, concerning these miracles I maintain, that on their authority we ought implicitly to receive the doctrines as coming from God, though these doctrines cannot, in all their

a Hom. II. v.

b St. Pet. Apol. p. 44. The reader will observe that these two circumstances, viz. the singular strength of evidence, and the express application of them or appeal made to them by the workers, for the confirmation of doctrines, are peculiar to, and characteristic of the miracles of the gospel; so that though we should allow, what we do not allow, that the miracles recorded of *Vespasian* (for instance) are equally well attested with those of the gospel, yet as these supposed miracles were not wrought in express confirmation of any doctrines, they come not into comparison with those of the gospel. They would only compel us, if we admitted their evidence, to confess that God had, in these instances, endued the emperor with a miraculous power, for some reason which we could not discover.

branches

branches and articles, be made appear consistent with the conceptions of man^a; the *decisive authority* of the miracles assuring us that they are thus consistent, though our *partial knowledge* of facts in this case, permit us not to perceive it; and the longest life being too short, even though we were masters of the necessary facts, for *evincing* that every particular contained in the history and doctrines of the bible is consistent with propositions supposed to be manifest truths, natural or moral.

THIS is the plain doctrine of the *Christian Apology* and it's *illustration*, and the candid reader will judge whether it be not properly supported.

^a St. Pet. Apol. p. 3. Whatever opposition there may be between this doctrine and the Passage of *Jer. Taylor* cited by *Mr. Heathcote*, Reply p. 29, note (x), they who have looked into some of this author's practical works, (written at a time of life when he had abandoned that sceptical spirit which, as he seemeth to have apprehended, gave much offence to good men in some parts of his *liberty of prophecyng*,) and particularly into his sermon entitled *Via intelligentia*, will readily allow, what I have said, that *Taylor* "would have pitied instead of abetting "the attempts of those writers who undertake, with the shallow "line of human conjecture, (the true name of reason partially "informed) to fathom the deep things of God; and who concede "to infidels that nothing is to be received, even upon the au- "thority of miracles attested with a singular strength of evidence, "as a revelation from God, which cannot in all it's branches "and articles be made appear to be at least not inconsistent with "the conceptions of man." That I have "employed this writer's authority to discredit the use of reason," is one of the many unsupported charges brought against me by *Mr. Heathcote* in behalf of the said reason, whose interests I pretend to have supported more effectually than he hath done, whether I have applied it more successfully or not, must be left to the determination of the candid reader.

II. WE must not, however, take leave of the subject of miracles without taking a short view of Mr. Heathcote's management of the *case of Abraham* (St. Pet. Apol. p. 64.) which very many persons have judged to be decisive in favour of the doctrine of the *Christian Apclogy*, and in exception to his examining system.

I have said^a that according to this system, *Abraham* must have suspended his assurance that the voice which commanded him to slay his son, was a real revelation from heaven, 'till he should have examined the *matter* of the command by the principles of *natural religion*; and that, in his examination, he would soon meet with two principles of it^b, with which the command was directly repugnant: he cannot therefore, on Mr. Heathcote's plan, be defended from the imputation of fanatic rashness, for obeying it.

How, now, doth this Gentleman go about to defend him? "We may," we are told, "reasonably imagine he was *infallibly certain*, that *the voice was no delusion*, but actually from heaven^c." What? when the purport of it was directly repugnant to those "principles of *natural religion* which are God's first revelation to mankind, and must be the *ultimate test* of every other revelation, and by which, therefore, all pretended revelations afterwards must

^a St. Pet. Apol. p. 65.

^b 1. That parents are to love and cherish their children.
2. That we are not to commit murder.

^c Reply, p. 134.

" be

" be examined, before we can know them to
 " be truly divine"—or, in other words,—“ by
 “ which, as by a test, every revelation must
 “ be tried, and approved, before it can gain ad-
 “ mittance into the mind of man^a? ” *Abraham*
 was therefore, according to Mr. *Heathcote's* doc-
 trine, “ infallibly certain, that the voice *was* a
 “ delusion.” Nor will it help this author out of
 his distress to add, as he doth, “ he had like-
 “ wise been assured that in *Isaac* should his seed
 “ be called; and therefore offered him up the
 “ more chearfully, accounting, as St. *Paul* says,
 “ that God was able to raise him, even from
 “ the dead.” This plea had been already thus
 precluded: “ In vain will it be said, (faith St.
 “ Pet. Apol. p. 65.) upon Mr. *Heathcote's* plan, in
 “ defence of *Abraham's* conduct, that he had
 “ reason to depend upon God's former promi-
 “ ses, and to believe that God would raise his
 “ son from the dead: this is supposing him as-
 “ sured that the command was from God, when
 “ it's failure on the *test*, it's repugnancy to the
 “ first and simplest principles of all morality and
 “ religion, compelled him to pronounce it an
 “ imposture.” But Mr. *Heathcote* hath, we see,
 with great alertness overleaped this *bar* to his *plea*,
 and, with an air of triumph, proceedeth—“ so
 “ THAT this obedience did not, as this Doctor ig-
 “ norantly affirms^c, tend utterly to extinguish the

a Use of R. p. 33.

b Reply, p. 68.

c To make this an ignorant affirmation, Mr. *Heathcote*, hath,
 after his wonted method, misquoted this Doctor. “ His obedi-
 “ ence,” say I, “ tended, in all human probability, utterly to
 “ extinguish

" pleasing hope that had been given him. From
 " all which it is plain^a, that what Abraham did
 " was neither rash nor enthusiastic, but the effect
 " of great deliberation and foresight^b." Is he,
 then, proving this to me, who have contended
 for it? What he is to prove is, "that what A-
 " braham did was not, according to his plan, rash
 " and enthusiastic." But, having proved nothing
 of this, he addeth, "he did in truth, examine
 " the matter of the command"—How? by Mr.
 Heathcote's test? — "and, if St. Paul can be re-
 lied on, it was the conclusion of reason that
 induced him to submit to it" — it certainly
 was; "the miraculous voice assured him, that
 " the command was from heaven, and therefore
 " he implicitly," without putting it to Mr. Heath-
 cote's test, "obeyed it"; — "λογισαμός, dedu-
 cing by fair and logical reasoning that God
 " was able" (God is able to do all things, there-

"extinguish the pleasing hope which had been given him." St.
 Pet. Apol. p. 66.

a Let the reader judge whether any thing be plain from what Mr. Heathcote hath said, but that he is unable to support his cause; and whether this expression of his would not strongly tempt one once more to quote upon him the *Tale of a Tub*. To his furious resentment (which hath foamed through four pages) * of the wit, which he is pleased to find in that quotation, (St. Pet. Apol. p. 59.) I shall make no other reply than what Dr. South † made to his adversary's reproaches on a like occasion: "Why, "is he so severe upon me for being witty? It might have pleased "God to have made him a wit."

b Reply, p. 134, 5.

c St. Pet. Apol. p. 66.

* Reply, p. 124, 5, 6, 7.

† Ego quamvis
Infra Lucili — ingenium — — — Hor.

fore

fore he is able to perform what he hath promised) "to raise up Isaac, even from the dead :"

THE reader will now determine whether Mr. Heathcote hath made it out, that *Abraham* did examine the matter of the command, according to his plan, trying it by his test ; and whether St. Paul's *λογισαμένος* doth prove, that he reasoned as Mr. Heathcote requireth us to reason, upon the matter of a command, before we admit it for divine.

BUT he will not be greatly concerned whether you allow this or not ; for though he hath hitherto laboured to prove

FIRST, that *Abraham* DID reason ; he proceedeth now to prove

SECONDLY, that he DID NOT reason. "They," we are told "who were the instruments of delivering a revelation to mankind "are not to be put upon a level with those who "were to receive it from them :— they were "not always left to the free use of their natural powers, but often-over-ruled by a supernatural and miraculous influence^b."

FOR proof of this, we are referred, 1st, to two Greek, and one Latin quotation ; of which, the two former arbitrarily assert, that the inspired are a sort of musical instruments to the divine spirit ; and the other, as Mr. Heathcote saith, rejecting this opinion, asserteth "the prophets "minds to be warmed, by divine impulse, to an "unusual degree, *præter morem*," in our author's translation, "far above humanity."

a. Reply p. 135. b Ibid.

WE are referred, 2dly, to the case of St. *Paul*, "forced into his office by a vision from "heaven;" and 3dly, to the case of *Abraham*, to whom "the command was delivered by God "himself." In these cases "reason and common "notions are not appealed to, but *born down* by "the stronger evidence of intuitive know-
ledge" —

Now in answer to all this *reasoning*, let us observe, *first*, that it doth not appear from scripture that reason and the natural powers were "over-ruled and *born down*" by inspiration; and that, indeed this proposition cannot be asserted unless by him who will assert, "that the doc-
trines of a divine revelation may contradict ma-
nifest natural or moral truths^a." Mr. *Heathcote*, we see, is astonishingly got into the extreme point of opposition to his own principles, and hath here consequentially maintained the inconsistency of revelation with the clear discoveries of reason.

LET us observe, *secondly*, that, whatever we are to determine concerning the illuminating *in-
spiration* of the prophets and apostles; however

^a Reply p. 136. Since one evidence cannot bear down another, without contradicting it, would not an infidel be strongly tempted to represent Mr. *Heathcote's* account here given of inspiration, as amounting to what he hath twice quoted from *Tully* against the doctrine of the *Christian Apology*? "Ut qui humanos sensus "amiserit, divinos affecutus fit."

^b How justly this real consequence of Mr. *Heathcote's* doctrine is fixed by him upon me, must be left to the judgment of the fair and equitable reader. He hath charged me with affirming "that the matter of revelation contradicts our notions of God, "and of the differences of good and evil." Reply p. 156.

we should allow that they were taught the truths they were to teach, by such illapses of the divine spirit as did, (not, indeed, *bear down*, but however,) supersede the use of, the *natural powers*; the present case of *Abraham* is by no means to be ranked in the class of such divine communications. God's address to *him* is expressly said to be, not an *inspiration*, but a *command for the sake of trial*^a; which, in the very nature of it, supposeth the person tried to be *left to the free use of his natural powers*. And as the matter of this command was so evidently inconsistent with two fundamental *principles* of Mr. *Heathcote's natural religion*, this gentleman cannot suppose him to have been assured that it came from God, without giving up, what I have all along sollicit-ed him to give up, his *ultimate test* for the trial of revelations; and acknowledging, that *miracles are decisive proofs of their divine origin*.

MR. *Heathcote's* conclusion of this subject is another of his *clear solutions of the matter*^b. "To say THEN, that the *prophets*, that *Paul*, that *Abraham* must have rejected these admonitions and appearances, as only the fruits of a disordered imagination, is, in effect, to say that God cannot make a revelation of himself to mankind; which, as it is a consequence of Dr. *Patten's*, I desire Dr. *Patten* may be answerable for it^c."

^a And it came to pass — "that God did tempt *Abraham* and said unto him, *Abraham* — take now thy son, thine only son *Isaac*, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering" — Gen. 22. 1, 2.

^b Vide *Tale of a Tub*.

^c Reply p. 136.

FIRST, Dr. Patten hath, indeed, said that "Abraham must," according to Mr. Heathcote's examining doctrine, "have rejected the admonition" to slay his son^a; and therefore, secondly, If this be, (though I see not that it is) "in effect to say that God cannot make a revelation of himself to mankind," it is a consequence of Mr. Heathcote's, and Mr. Heathcote must be answerable for it.

12. My second illustration for manifesting the necessity of resting the credibility of the gospel upon its *external proofs*, consisted in setting forth the utter incapacity of the greatest part of mankind for examining any other proofs.

MR. Heathcote's reasoning, in his way of reasoning, against the purport of this illustration, hath spread itself, (without denying the fact alledged,) through nine pages, in which he hath recommended a plan of popular exhortation, which I will beg leave to dissent from; it is, "to incite the multitude to raise themselves up as nearly as possible to the level of the few, by the same cultivation of their natural powers^b."

As the method by which the few have cultivated their natural powers, is by recourse had to science and learned languages, and the approved authors who have written in those languages, and in our own, I can by no means think of giving Mr. Heathcote's advice to the *multitude*; since, first, it is not necessary to the ends of religion; and, secondly, would manifestly tend to beggar the land, if it were even attempted; and,

^a St. Pet. Apol. p. 64, 65.

^b Reply p. 146.
thirdly,

thirdly, could not, after all, be attempted to any purpose. I would therefore admonish the multitude to think themselves happy if the exigencies of life have permitted them to learn *to read*; that they may be able, as Mr. Heathcote saith, to *search the scriptures, and enquire into the grounds and reasons of a christian's faith*; that is, that they may read of those *miracles which Jesus did*, and which *are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that, believing, ye may have life through his name*^a.—That they may have immediate recourse to God's *living oracles*, as far as the necessary occasions of life will permit, and, *from their childhood may know the holy scriptures which are able*, being received into an honest and good heart, *to make them wise unto salvation*^b.

BUT if it have been their fate to be denied the means of having recourse to the holy scriptures with their *eyes*, yet is not their case desperate while their *ears* are open; though, according to Mr. Heathcote's examining system, they (nay the learned themselves,) have no hope. Let them but diligently attend, what the laws of this land would compel them to attend, the *service of the church*, and they will be sure to *hear* the mighty works whereby Jesus Christ demonstrated himself to be the son of God, and the heavenly doctrines which he taught; and if their minister be such a one as, agreeably to his solemn vow, *preacheth not himself but Christ Jesus the Lord, and himself their Servant for Jesus sake*^c,

^a John 20. 30, 31.

^b 2 Tim. 3.15.

^c 2 Cor. 4. 5.

not

not seeking his own praise, but “the profit of “many, that they may be saved;” if such be their minister, they will hear these doctrines, acknowledged for divine upon their proper appointed credentials, explained according to the *analogy of faith*, and pressed upon their consciences by all those powerful motives by which the spirit of God hath been pleased to recommend them; and so may they, by his gracious favour, though they cannot read, be blessed in the number of those who *hear the word of God and keep it.*

13. IN expostulating with Mr. *Heathcote* in the behalf of the *decisive authority* of miracles, I had observed that his method of joining issue with infidels upon his previous, *internal proof*, had made no impression, gained no ground upon infidelity. This assertion Mr. *Heathcote* doth not deny; but asketh what the divine must have done, when the infidel arose and objected to the *matter* of revelation, declaring its ends and doctrines to be absurd, contradictory and unworthy of God? “Must he have owned, saith he, the “objection to be well grounded? Must he have “allowed that *Christianity is not founded on argument*, and therefore, cannot be defended upon “rational principles? Yes, says this doctor, he “must have allowed it; no life being long e-“nough to prove the contrary.”

ACCORDING to this representation, he who asserteth that life is not long enough for answering all the objections which may be made to a

a Reply, p. 148.

doctrine,

doctrine, doth by that assertion allow the doctrine to be indefensible upon rational principles, absurd, contradictory, and unworthy of God ! As closely reasoned, as if it should be said that, because I assert no life to be long enough to prove to the vulgar the *contrary* of all their ignorant objections to the late regulation of the *stile*, therefore I assert that *this regulation is indefensible upon rational principles, absurd, contradictory, and unworthy of the legislature !*

MR. Heathcote having been thus unfortunate and unsuccessful in answering for *this doctor*, let me have leave to answer for myself to his question " What must the divine have done when " the infidel arose who objected to the *matter* of " revelation, declaring both it's ends and doc- " trines to be absurd, contradictory and unwor- " thy of God ? "

THE divine, then, I say, should have replied, and would to God every divine had thus replied ! That the *general* end, and, at least, the *moral* doc-trines of this revelation are not even by infidels excepted against ; and if some particulars of it should seem to be unreconcileable with our no-tions of things, we ought to rank them with o-ther appearances both in human life, and in the course of nature, which we cannot explain while we remain ignorant of those circumstances which, if known, might make us ashamed of our rash-ness in pronouncing upon them : — That the messenger of this revelation wrought many mighty works, performable only through divine power, and *appealed to them* in confirmation of his

his divine mission ; — that these mighty works are related by the eye-witnesses of them, “*that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that, believing, we may have life in his name*” : — That therefore, in the difficult cases we are speaking of, the true inference is, “*That the revelation is therefore wise, and good, and just, and fit to be received and submitted to by us, because we have sufficient reason to believe it comes from God*”.

THE obvious benefit of giving *this* answer to the infidel’s objections is, that the debate, which hath now dilated itself into an endless variety of vain janglings, concerning the *fitness* and *reasonableness* of almost every *doctrine* delivered, and *fact* recorded in the bible, would have been hereby confined to the issue of one single point, viz: “*whether the miracles of the gospel are decisive proofs of a divine commission?*”

IF the affirmative of this question be true, all enquiries concerning the *fitness* of the matter of

a John XX. 30, 31.

b This Sentence is part of a Passage already cited in St. Pet. Apol. p. 72. from the late Bp of London’s first Pastoral Letter, and is so clearly expressive of my meaning, that I could not prevail upon myself to put it in any other words. Mr. Heathcote hath cited a passage from the same author, which he would have us take for his real sentiments, and would insinuate that it’s purport is opposite to that of the passage cited by me. Whether his Lordship be in all his writings consistent with himself, it concerneth not me to enquire; certain it is that when he wrote what I have extracted from him, he was entirely of my opinion with regard to the *decisive authority of the external evidence of the gospel*, and the reasons which he hath offered for this opinion have never been attempted to be overthrown but by loose declamation in favour of the *powers and liberties of reason*, which are, in truth, not in the least infringed by the doctrine here maintained.

the

the revelation are not only impertinent, but blasphemous also. The divine credentials will demand an implicit assent and reverence to the doctrines, and an active submission of our partially-informed reason to the infinite goodness, and the all-knowing wisdom of God.

14. THE chief cause why the proof of the truth of christianity hath been taken off from this footing, was in some measure, I fear, what hath been before intimated; the *reasoning pride* of some christian writers, who found the temptation of honour and applause to be acquired by ingenious pleadings upon points of abstract speculation, too strong to be resisted.

BUT another considerable cause of this unadvised step, hath been the too hastily acknowledging, that *because* some miracles seem to be hinted in scripture to have been wrought by evil spirits, (though these, if accurately examined, might, as hath been intimated, perhaps come to nothing,) and also, *because* numbers of *Pagan* and *Popish* miracles have been strongly attested, therefore the miracles of the gospel are not, of themselves, sufficient proofs of the divine mission of those who wrought them.

THIS concession would never have been made, had due attention been paid 1. To the *mightiness* of the miracles of Jesus Christ; 2. to their *peculiar beneficent nature*; 3. to their *peculiar strength of evidence*; and 4. The *peculiar, express appeal made to them for evincing the divine truth of doctrines.*

THESE joint-circumstances are characteristic marks of so essential a superiority of the gospel-miracles^a over all others that have been heard of, as will not suffer any of them to come in any sort of competition with those, for the decisiveness of whose evidence I am contending.

THERE is no miracle any where recorded, which doth not fall short of those of the gospel in some one or more of these characteristic marks; and therefore not one of them can be alledged in abatement of the *convincing force* of the miracles which are possessed of those marks.

IN the mighty works of the gospel then,
 "Behold the fortress, erected by the Captain
 "himself of our salvation, of a christian's rea-
 "soning! The naturally fortified post, which if
 "he desert, to pursue the enemy, through eager-
 "ness for the honour of a victory, into the bogs
 "and quagmires of abstract reasoning, the very
 "province of the ruler of the darkness of this
 "world, he will then fall a sure prey to his de-
 "vices!"

15. NOTHING more unkind hath passed from Mr. Heathcote in this debate, than his attempt to embroil me with my old friend the author of a sermon lately published, whom he hath represented as *expostulating with me*, in a paragraph which he citeth from that sermon, which doth not stand in any sort of opposition to, (and certainly the purport of the sermon coincideth with) the doctrine advanced by me.

^a Including those of the old testament, whose reality and importance is established by the gospel.

MR. Heathcote's surmise is grounded only upon one single, short expression in that sermon, similar to one in mine.

I HAD said that it would be fatal to christians to *desert* the naturally-fortified *post* of the gospel-miracles, (which would be done by allowing that they are not decisive proofs of Jesus Christ's divine mission,) and to pursue the enemy into the bogs and quagmires of abstract reasoning, which would be done by allowing, that a christian apologist ought to explain, and accordingly undertaking to explain, all the difficulties, reconcile all the seeming inconsistencies, and solve all the objections which may be alledged against any part of the scriptures, before the evidence of the miracles for their divine origin can be admitted.

DOETH then the *expostulation* referred to, stand in any opposition to this doctrine? doth it *insist* upon our *pursuing* the enemy into the bogs and quagmires of *abstract reasoning*? or allow that miracles of Jesus Christ are *not decisive* proofs of his divine mission? On the contrary, is it not the general drift and scope of the sermon, to evince the credibility of the gospel-history? and is not the great use of evincing it, the securing the firm assent of mankind to those miraculous facts which make that *external evidence* of the gospel for whose importance I have been all along contending? Why, then, will Mr. Heathcote presume to fix upon that gentleman's expostulation a design which doth not hold any consistency, either with the expostulation itself, or

with the purport of the sermon from whence it is extracted !

I HAVE farther complaint to make against Mr. Heathcote in behalf of the author of this *sermon*.

HE hath used an expression in it as a handle for casting the imputation of ignorance on two gentlemen, who, as that author will be ready to acknowledge, have as good reputation for learning and abilities as himself.

LASTLY, He hath insinuated, that this author's apprehensions, (expressed in the close of his sermon,) "left, the rational method of supporting christianity being discarded it's *real evidences* should grow out of use, and it's *credibility* in consequence of this, in time wear away ;" he hath, I say, insinuated that these apprehensions have in their view the doctrine of the *christian apology* — which hath insisted upon the use and allegation of *those very evidences*, (the facts recorded in the gospel-history,) which it is the business of the sermon on the *gospel-credibility* to support ! an insinuation which obliquely chargeth the author of this sermon with having gone out of his way on purpose to cast a reproach upon a plan which is so nearly allied to his own.

16. IN this writer's 151st page our doctor is charged with having dropped insinuations, and with supposing by the tenor of his plan, that the rise and progress of infidelity is owing, in a great measure to the use of reason. This position hath often indeed by this writer and others been charged, but never once attempted to be proved upon the author of the *Christian Apology* and it's *further*

ther illustration, in both which, the nature and grounds of just reasoning are clearly set forth; and the successful application of it to religious subjects pointed out and recommended, and nothing declared against but that grossest offence against reason “the confident deducing of conclusions from precarious, uncertain premises.”

BUT taking it for granted that his charge against our doctor is true, he proceedeth to assert that “nothing is more inconceivable” than my fancied position, “or appears to have less foundation in fact.”

THOUGH his proof of what I have not denied doth not affect me, let us, for curiosity, take a view of it. It is this, that “in popish countries, “where the use of reason is forbid under the “strongest pains and penalties, infidelity prevails “more than in any other parts of Christendom.” Now the question is, whether, notwithstanding these pains and penalties, those infidels may not use their reason? If this should be the case, the proof is altogether inconclusive. Its form is as followeth :

Infidelity prevails most in popish countries where the use of reason is strictly forbidden;

Therefore infidelity cannot be owing to the use of reason.

WERE we to admit the fact asserted in the antecedent proposition, the consequence deduced from it is altogether *Heathcotician*. If you deny this consequence, his direct proof of it must be that

Reason

Reason is not exercised when the use of it is forbidden under strong pains and penalties.

Now the testimony which he hath adduced from the *wisest and most judicious Bishop Burnet* for proving that "in *Italy* men of searching understandings turn infidels" (which, by the way is no proof, though intended as a proof, of the antecedent proposition) unfortunately asserteth that it is by the use and exercise of reason that these searching geniuses turn infidels: "finding, "saith the bishop, such notorious cheats as appear in many parts of their religion, they are, "upon that, induced to disbelieve the whole." If they did not exert their reason how could they discover these cheats, or infer from them the falsehood of their religion?

ONE cannot however allow their understandings to be so very searching as the good bishop would make them; since it is beneath even common-sized understandings to take so preposterous a stride to it's conclusion, as to infer that "because one class of christians introduce notorious cheats into religion, therefore christianity "itself is to be rejected."

HIS friend *Chillingworth* cited along with *Burnet* for the support of his assertion, doth no less peremptorily turn evidence against him. "Consider," saith *Chillingworth*, "the swarms of deists in *Italy*, and then tell me whether your unreasonable and contradictory doctrines, "your forged miracles and counterfeit legends "have not in all probability produced this effect." If the reason of those swarms of deists had not exerted

exerted itself, notwithstanding pains and penalties, to discover and reject the contradictions and forgeries with which popery aboundeth, they had quietly and unsuspectingly swallowed down all that was proposed to them by that absurd church, and the name of infidelity had not been heard of amongst them.

Thus inconclusive are this gentleman's arguments, thus refractory his evidence! And the short moral to be drawn from what hath been observed upon them is, that a man may make loud outcries in behalf of the reasoning faculty, without understanding how to reason.

17. THE passage cited in *St. Pet. Apol.* from Mr. *Leslie*, was produced for no other purpose than that which it plainly serveth; viz. to prove "that this gentleman thought miracles to be, of themselves, sufficient proofs of a divine mission." That *passage* is no part of the scheme of his *short method*, but a *supposition* on which that work proceedeth. The *scheme of the work*^a is "to prove, by *four marks*, found in the miracles of Moses and Jesus Christ, (but incompatible with falsely pretended miracles) that those miracles were *really wrought*;" a proposition which, when proved, Mr. *Leslie* supposeth will put their divine mission out of all dispute; since their miracles "if true, do," as he taketh it for granted, "vouch the truth of what they delivered."

BUT Mr. *Heathcote*, who hath "read over the *short method* — and likewise the *defence of it*,"

a See *Leslie's short method with the deists.*

informeth

informeth us, that “Mr. *Leslie's* drift in both “these performances is” (what the reader hath just now seen it is not) “to prove that miracles “are sufficient to establish the divinity of the “gospel; which,” saith he, “I am so far from “denying, that I affirm this divinity cannot be “proved without them.” — As if one should say, I am so far from denying that the knowledge of the rules of prosody is a sufficient qualification for composing an epic poem, that I affirm such a poem cannot be made without it! But, seriously; if Mr. *Heathcote* doth not, as he hath here intimated he doth not, deny the sufficiency of miracles to establish the divinity of the gospel, let the reader determine whether he hath not, by this intimation, given up the point which it is the main purpose of both his books to maintain.

18. THE verses cited in *St. Peter's Christian Apology*^a from Mr. *Pope*, were placed there as well describing some of the monstrous principles of *Socinus*, and those bitter fruits of them, which the *Christian Apology* had lamented.

BUT not the least hint was given or intended against Mr. *Heathcote*, as I doubt not the candid reader, who hath attended to that part of my book, will do me the justice to allow. This gentleman hath taken these verses to himself; and how far he hath now gained a title to them in stiling *Socinianism* an *imaginary evil*^c, let others judge.

^a Reply, p. 157,

^b P. 29.

^c Reply, p. 167.

19. To what purpose the long story, extended through thirteen pages, about *Chillingworth* and *Cheynell*, is introduced, is hard to be discovered; unless it was intended that the kind reader should look upon Mr. *Heathcote* as a *Chillingworth*, and his adversary as a *Cheynell*.

IT doth not belong to this place to enquire into the principles of either of those writers; I shall only observe that Mr. *Heathcote* hath dealt unfairly with poor *Cheynell* in representing him as having asserted "that master *Chillingworth* did "run mad with *too much reason*". The passage alledged by him from *Cheynell* as containing that assertion, is this: "Reason tells you that there "are some things above reason; and you cannot "be so unreasonable as to make reason judge of "those things which are above reason. Remem- "ber that master *Chillingworth*, your friend, did "run mad with reason" — To the former part of this passage, every man of sound sense will, I believe, subscribe, viz. that *some things are above reason*; and it is unreasonable to make reason judge of those things which are above reason. And if Mr. *Cheynell* thought he saw just cause for fixing the imputation of this procedure upon master *Chillingworth*, then, he did not charge him with running mad, for *too much reason*, but for *too little*, that is, for being *unreasonable*.

I SHALL not here enter upon the foreign enquiry, what might be the real merit of *Cheynell* or of *Chillingworth*; whether the one exalted, or the other decried human reason absurdly. The

a Reply, p. 163.

b Ibid.

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one remark I shall make on this occasion is, that it hath been Mr. Heathcote's aim throughout this whole debate, to represent himself as an advocate for the *powers and liberties of reason*, and his adversary as *attempting to destroy or enslave it*. Deceived, or at least endeavouring to impose upon his readers, by this sophism in reasoning, which is termed *ignoratio Elenchi*, (a misapprehension of his adversary's proposition, and a fierce attack made upon it so misrepresented^a,) he hath not once, throughout his two books, attempted to overthrow the *real*, peculiar doctrine of the *Christian Apology*, viz. That the only foundation of that effective reasoning which produceth *knowledge of real truth*, is the assured knowledge of those *facts and realities* which the reasoning supposeth; because if, after all, there should be no such facts and realities, and the ideas employed in the reasoning should be only *fantastic ideas*; the knowledge, obtained by such reasoning would be the knowledge, not of *real*, but

^a This Sophism hath in the same manner deceived the brisk author of a preface to a late book entitled, *A Free and Candid Examination of the Principles advanced in the Bp of London's Sermons*: Who hath insulted and triumphed over the author of the *Christian Apology*, as intending to overthrow the *powers and liberties of reason*, — against which he hath not spoken one syllable. To check the eagerness of reason, hastning to deduce conclusions from uncertain premises, and pronounce upon facts without a proper knowledge of their circumstances, is certainly no more declaring against the powers and liberties of reason, than it is declaring against the powers and liberties of sight to caution a man not to pronounce peremptorily on objects which he vieweth in an insufficient degree of light: a rashness which hath often metamorphosed a range of bushes into an army of soldiers, and an elbow chair into an apparition.

chimerical truth. This is the incontestable principle from which I have clearly inferred, that since man is necessarily unacquainted with many of those *facts and realities*, (nay all, but the few that are revealed,) by which God's various dealings with mankind are guided, in the process of his creation, providence, and redemption; therefore it is arrogance and vain presumption to pronounce decisively, from topical reasonings, concerning the wisdom, justice, goodness of those acts and doctrines recorded in scripture, which he hath not there explained to us: however his good spirit may explain them to the meek and lowly Christian, who hath, on the offered credentials of miracles, given himself up implicitly to the guidance of his heavenly teacher.

MR. Heathcote, I say, hath not once attacked the principle from whence this consequence evidently floweth, and which, indeed, is a firm support to all that I have any where advanced concerning the decisive evidence of miracles. If this principle be true, then that evidence which is called *internal*, (viz. the perception of the consonance of the whole *matter* of revelation with wisdom, justice, goodness, natural or moral truth; this evidence) is not naturally within our reach, and therefore, either the *external* is sufficient, or the gospel hath no sufficient evidence *.

a This disjunctive argument will I apprehend be demonstrative to Christians, "that miracles are, of themselves, decisive proofs of the divine authority of the gospel;" and I have endeavoured, in some parts of this book, to demonstrate the same proposition by such considerations as ought to weigh with infidels.

20. No material article of Mr. *Heathcote's* book remaineth now unnoticed, besides his vindication of that seemingly disingenuous quotation from the editors of Mr. *Hutchinson*, in which he hath suppressed the important words **WE SAY NOT**, an omission which, as he confesseth, “hath made a great deal of noise^a.”

OF all his severities there is none so uncharitable as his insinuation on this occasion, “that it “will be impossible to satisfy me by any account “he can give^b. ”

His plea (p. 15, 16.) is plausible enough. He conceived that the editors had unsaid, in the latter part of the passage in question, the censure which they had seemed to pass upon Mr. *Hutchinson* in the former part of it, and this was the reason “WHY HE DROPPED THEM,” without thinking he deviated, by the omission, from their meaning in the amount of the whole paragraph. Had he stopped here, all had been right, and many of his readers, and Dr. *Patten* amongst them, would readily have believed his plea to be sincere, whatever they had judged of its real merit.

BUT he hath unfortunately ruined all by urging his justification too far. He proceedeth in the following paragraph to clear himself farther, by informing us of what he stileth “another “blunder^d which he made in quoting from Mr.

^a Reply, p. 15. ^b p. 18. ^c p. 17.

^d If the reader turn to this *blunder* in the Use of R. p. 95. Note (M) he will find that the blunderer hath erected upon it a severe sarcasm upon Mr. *Hutchinson's* editors and *followers*; in which latter class he expressly, in that Note, as well as in Note

(P) p. 99 &c.

"*Hutchinson himself.*" Here it is plainly intimated that the *omission* in question was not owing to the reason just now pleaded, but to a *blunder*, or a misapprehension of his author's meaning. Read on to the close of this very paragraph and you will be apprized of a new cause of this *omission* — "Surely," faith he, "I have a right to be believed concerning the omission above, when I say that it flowed from forgetfulness, and not from design."

MR. Heathcote hath, then, presented us with three causes of his *dropping* the words **WE SAY NOT**; viz.

First, *Design*;

Secondly, not *design*, but *forgetfulness*;

Thirdly, *blunder*, or *misapprehension*.

Let the reader make his own choice out of this curious variety, which our author hath thus kindly spread before him.

They who have attended to this examination of Mr. Heathcote's reply, must now be left to determine in what manner he hath "exposed the fool and unmasked the knave".

To them it is likewise referred to determine, *against whom* he hath asserted, or whether, indeed, he hath at all asserted, "the cause of reason and liberty^b"; and how far he hath promoted, or how far differved, "the pure and uncorrupted religion of the gospel^c".

(P) p. 99 &c, ranketh Dr. Patten. The reader may, if he please, compare these two notes with what Mr. Heathcote saith, Reply, p. 70. "Now I did not charge him (Dr. P.) with being a follower of Mr. Hutchinson."

a Reply, p. 178.

b ib.

c ib.

B U T

BUT whatever others may judge of these points, Mr. Heathcote himself is perfectly well satisfied with his exploit. "Life, he is persuaded, cannot be spent more laudably;" and, "luckily, he wanteth neither resolution, nor spirit, nor leisure for undertakings of this kind, being independent, not only upon *any man*, but upon *any thing* in the world; placed, as He is, "by "his fortune" not, like many others, *above the want* of "the necessaries of life," but, in a degree of angelic perfection, *above the necessities themselves*". Unless, perhaps he hath committed a mistake in this place, in using the word *necessaries*, when his sentiment required the word *necessities*.

BUT however right he may be as to his *spirit, resolution, leisure, or independency*, he will now be convinced, one may hope, that he hath mistaken his *talents* in conceiving himself to be a *reasoner*, and that if he were so, he would, however, have misapplied them in undertaking the defence of a cause, which is indeed indefensible by the acutest reasoner.

THE evidence of the gospel is such as God hath established it, and no human ingenuity can alter it. Imagination, indeed, may pleasingly dress up her own conceits, but "the counsel of "the Lord, that" alone "shall stand." The prophecies of the old testament, foreshewing the anointed of God, the redeemer of the world;

a Reply, p. 179. — "who are by their fortunes *above the necessities of life*, and who ought by their philosophy to be above "the superfluities of it."

and

and so wonderfully accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ — The miracles and wonders and signs wrought and expressly appealed to for evincing his divine mission — the great and transcendent miracle of his resurrection, confirmed to chosen witnesses, who in their preaching constantly appealed to this and to the rest of his miracles, and to the testimony born to him by all the prophets, as to irrefragable proofs of the divine truth of the doctrines which they came to preach in his name, all along producing these credentials *before* they proposed those doctrines — These circumstances, I say, are a demonstration for every serious christian, that these various miracles were appointed by God for decisive instruments of conviction to mankind.

HAD the *ingenious* modern plan of demonstration been of God's appointment, we may reasonably enquire,

FIRST, whether the articles of revelation would not have been so fully set before us in all their circumstances, as to make us competent judges of the fitness and propriety of each of them? would they not have been *proposed* to us as philosophers, rather than *prescribed* as to diseased patients, and *dictated* as to captives intended to be freed from impending death? We may enquire,

SECONDLY, Whether we see in the preaching of *Christ* and his apostles, the least traces of this plan? Whether their doctrines are any where proposed and submitted to examination, and enforced by argumentation on the propriety, fitness, expediency, and consistency with *natural notions*,

of

of the several articles of them? Do we find these teachers any where saying, "These are the doctrines we are sent to preach; examine them, "and try first; whether, for any thing that reason hath to urge to the contrary, they may be divine truths; and when they have approved themselves to your understandings by an evident consistency with all the *natural and moral truths* you know, then let these instances of miraculous power, (common, we confess, to us with evil spirits) convince you that they are divine truths?"

OR do we not see the reverse of all this in their proceedings? Not a doctrine is, throughout the gospel, enforced from the consideration of it's fitness, and correspondency with *common notions*, nor indeed from any other *reasoning* but such as proceedeth either, *first*, upon *Jewish principles*, i. e. upon the supposition of the divine authority of the old testament; (of which sort are many of the reasonings of St. Paul;) or, *secondly*, upon *christian principles*, i. e. upon the supposition of the truth of the gospel-doctrines; or, *thirdly*, upon this principle of the *christian apology*, "that the miracles recorded in the gospel are decisive proofs of a divine authority."

AND it ought to be seriously remembred upon this occasion, That *the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, whose irreversible sentence, pronounced by Christ himself, is eternal damnation, is plainly nothing else, but the *asserting* of that, which is *supposed possible* by the patrons of the *examining doctrine*, "That such miracles as were wrought

"wrought by Jesus Christ may proceed from unclean spirits".

How nearly, then, do they approach to that dreadful sin, who engage themselves to subscribe to this blasphemous assertion, unless they can so explain *the things of the spirit of God* to infidels, (who, in their infidel-state, *cannot discern them*^a) as to demonstrate to them the consistency of every part of scripture with every manifest *truth, natural or moral*, which may seem to stand in opposition to it!

THESE considerations will, we may hope, have some weight with *christians*, for convincing them how unnecessary that *plenary, previous examination* is, which never had being but in *ingenious theory*; and for reconciling them to an implicit assent to all the doctrines, and a *reverential acquiescence* in all the divine proceedings, (whether comprehensible or mysterious,) recorded in the holy scriptures, upon the single inducement and evidence of the miracles.

To infidels we may urge, what hath, indeed, been already urged, that the *previous examination* which they insist upon for fixing what is called the *internal evidence* of revelation, is, 1st, altogether *impossible* to be made, from our necessary ignorance, or, at best, our partial knowledge of the nature and circumstances of many things treated of in the scriptures, which are therefore foolishness, according to St. Paul, until, through faith, we spiritually discern them: 2dly, That such examination is altogether *unnecessary*, the

a See Mar. III. 28, 29, 30.

b 1 Cor. II. 14.

prophecies of the old, and the miracles of the new testament, being, of themselves, decisive proofs of, what they were alledged to confirm, the divine authority of him who wrought the one and fulfilled the other^a.

Nor can the cogency and sufficiency of these proofs be denied by any, but either by those who absolutely reject the faith of history; or who

^a Let it be observed in this place, that this doctrine of the *Christian Apology*, hath lately received a fresh approbation, in the requested publication of Mr. Barton's excellent Latin sermon preached before the University of Oxford, entitled, "Firmitas Prophetic Sermonis;" in which it is asserted of the miracles and prophecies, "Hisce duobus causæ firmamentis nihil deest ad intellectum movendum qui quidem argumento pervius sit & penetrabilis. P. 4. And again. p. 5. "Hæc esse indubitata veritatis Criteria, una atque eadem ubique est consentientis naturæ vox." Nay, this fulness and sufficiency of evidence is, in the 21st page, attributed to the prophecies singly; — "fidem nostram sanctissimam solis prædictionibus sacris firmissime staturam."

Having mentioned the requested publication of this sermon, I shall here take occasion to observe that what Mr. H. hath advanced on the subject of *requests*, proceedeth from his unacquaintedness with the practice of the university in these matters. They who are acquainted with it know, 1st. That no sermon was ever printed there at the unanimous request of the *whole body*. 2. That whereas there are three forms of notifying this request, viz. the common one,

— V. C. and Heads of Houses —
and two new ones,

— V. C. and other Heads of Houses —

— V. C. and the Heads of Houses —

the second of these forms is, for obvious reasons, most consistent with truth as well as with propriety of speech, and therefore fittest to be used on all occasions.

I shall only add that a Sermon which was preached at St. Mary's on the very same Sunday, and whose publication was two days after requested by the same authority and in the same breath with the *Christian Apology*, was printed with the intimation that it was published at the Request of the V. C. and Heads of Houses.

maintain

maintain that so many *prophecies* could be so precisely fulfilled *fortuitously*, and that such *miracles* might proceed from diabolical power; or lastly who affirm, with Mr. *Heathcote* and Mr. *Hume*, “that no force of human testimony can give credibility to such facts as are disconformable to observation and experience;” or, which amounteth to the same thing, that, “let the lives and characters of witnesses be what they will, their testimony must finally be determined by the *nature of the facts* they attest, and will ever obtain more or less credit with men, as those facts are more or less conformable to observation and experience.” The consequence of which position is, that miracles, being *not at all* conformable to observation and experience, can never obtain any credit *at all*, but are absolutely and *essentially* incredible.

LET us then boldly repeat our recommendation of the true scripture-method of defending the gospel against all the fancied *internal objections* which infidels may alledge against it. If they shall demand, How can these things be? — Why are matters ordered thus? — How is this consistent with natural notions? — Let not the Christian affect to be wise above what is written, in undertaking to lay open and explain the motives and grounds of the whole counsel of God in those things, which being known to us only from revelation, cannot possibly be farther known than so far as they are revealed. Let him not rashly stake the issue of his cause upon the

validity of such solutions as are founded upon mere conjectures, which have no more of decisive authority than the contrary conjectures of his adversaries. In a word, let him not rest the credit of God's word upon the unfirm foundation of topical probabilities and hypothetical reasonings, when Jesus Christ hath founded it upon a rock, upon the steady foundation of miraculous acts and events which nothing but the power of God could bring to pass.

BE it, indeed, unreservedly granted, that man hath *a right to examine* the pretensions of those who address him under the character of teachers commissioned by God. But be it at the same time insisted on, thar *Socinus* and his disciples take too much upon them, when they demand more, in consequence of this right, than an assurance that the commission is authentic. When this appeareth by the proper seal annexed, the seal of miracles, expressly appealed to on this occasion, the commission itself is to be received and acknowledged with implicit reverence.

AND this is the case of that book which being in this manner authenticated we assert to be the word of God. It's contents are the various acts and dealings of this all-knowing, all-powerful God, instituted for the recovery of the race of men, from that state of wretchedness and destruction into which, as we learn both from this book and from nature itself, they were fallen.

WERE our knowledge commensurate with his, then might we boldly canvass the reality and the motives of all the facts, the wisdom and

pro-

propriety and justice of all the proceedings recorded in those volumes which Christians hold sacred. But as shortsighted and imperfect and scanty as our measure of information is when compared with that vast extent of things, which God vieweth at one glance, yet is every man enough informed to know, what hath often been here insisted on, that it is the reproach instead of being the glory of his understanding, to dogmatize upon subjects which being known only by revelation, and being partially revealed, are of consequence partially known, "as if human reason, and his reason in particular, could attain a thorough conviction on these subjects."

THE proper use and exercise of reason in matters of revelation, is not to frame rhetorical justifications of all the seeming *unfitnesses*, and to clear up by conjectural solutions those *doubts* over which God hath thought fit to throw his mystic veil, and to which our faculties are probably not commensurate; an arrogant undertaking of an endless task! an attempt which, like that of Babel, must necessarily break off unfinished, in confusion! — but to enquire with diligence

1. Whether the history in which this revelation is contained be authentic.

a Hume's Hist. of Engl. v. 2. p. 127. The words make the close of this historian's reflection upon Hobbes's dogmatical air of philosophizing in politicks and morals. Would one expect to find the author of that reflection as dogmatical all along upon religious subjects "as if human reason, and his reason in particular, could attain a thorough conviction on these subjects?"

2. Whether

2. Whether the facts alledged by the teacher as proofs of his divine authority, do avail to establish such authority.
3. Whether these facts be sufficiently evidenced for inducing a reasonable man's assent.

If these points be determined in the affirmative the acquiescence of reason in the doctrines proposed followeth by a sort of natural necessity ; and we are no more at liberty to enquire " what " is this, wherefore is that," when the revelation itself doth not supply an answer to such enquiry, than Abraham was at liberty, after a clear command from God, to enquire how this command " to slay his son Isaac," was consistent either with the promise, " that in Isaac should his seed " be called," or with our natural notions of the divine purity and goodness.

We will readily grant that he is an absurd believer, a dreamer, a fanatic, an enthusiast who is disposed to receive any system of doctrines under the character of divine communications without rational evidence, that is without such evidence as the wisdom of God hath pitched upon for authenticating the messages sent by him to mankind. However holy and pure and worthy of God the moral doctrines of our blessed Saviour were, he still thought it expedient to enforce his divine commission by the sanction of miracles ; and the authority of this example will warrant our expecting in all cases the seal of miracles to be annexed to every commission pretended to come from heaven, before we receive it

it under that character. What the wisdom of God hath thought necessary, let not man account superfluous ; and if our blessed Saviour hath put his whole credit upon this test, when he saith, “ If I do not the works of my father believe me not, but if I do, tho’ ye believe not me believe the works,” we may from hence infer, that miracles are those very credentials by which his communications demand our attention and belief ^a.

He therefore who is humbly disposed to acquiesce in God’s own method of proceeding, will receive all those doctrines and informations which are recommended to his faith by indisputable miracles, as the truths of God : and with regard to those points in them which he cannot reconcile with his own apprehensions, he will suppose, either that these apprehensions however universally adopted are yet untrue ; or else, that the seeming inconsistency ariseth wholly from his *partial* knowledge of the *deep things of God* ; revealed to him largely enough for the purposes of salvation, but not of dogmatical decision.

BUT he, on the other hand, will never have a chance for believing at all, much less for prevailing upon others to believe, whose principle it is to examine the *matter* of revelation in order to adjust it to human notions, (a task which re-

^a That genuine and properly attested miracles are a direct and natural proof of the divine commission of him who appealeth to them for this purpose, appeareth evidently to have been the sense of all ages, from the appeal which false pretenders to a divine authority have constantly made to forged and ill attested miracles.

quireth

quireth a perfect insight into the whole constitution of things, and into God's whole measures founded upon it) before he will address himself to the examination of what he stileth the *external evidence*, the very evidence to which alone the messengers of this revelation appealed.

LEAVING therefore such Persons to wander in their own labyrinths, we may, upon the principles here largely maintained, pronounce that the proper use and exercise of *reason in matters of religion*, the whole extent of her province, is to examine with the whole effort of her judgment and sagacity the pretensions of an offered revelation, and with the utmost nicety to scrutinize the divine credentials to which it appealeth in order to convince herself whether there be in them any traces of fraud or collusion, whether they be sufficiently attested for inducing assent, or whether they may not be accounted for by human contrivance; or lastly, if they evidently exceed human power, whether any but that of God is capable of effecting them. Hitherto may reason come, but no farther: implicit reverence and submission to the doctrines recommended to our faith and practice by awful, indisputable credentials is now the only part of reason, which must receive the kingdom of God as a little child, if we have hope to enter therein.

AND indeed, when it is considered that the gospel-revelation is a plan contrived by infinite wisdom for the recovery of a race of blind, ignorant creatures from their fallen, lost estate, few words are wanting for exposing that shocking

ing pride and arrogance of these creatures which refuseth to accept of the offered deliverance, until every article of it be reconciled with their own, perhaps misconceived, notions of God and nature, and until satisfaction be given to any idle or arrogant or sceptical enquiry.

How justly are such demands rebuked in that fine expostulation, which will as forcibly justify the difficulties of God's revelation as of his common providence!

Of this vast frame the bearings and the ties,
The close connections, nice dependencies,
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul.
Look'd thro?

RENOUNCING then, all pretensions to an undertaking, to which nothing but omniscience is equal, let us leave with the rising apologists of the christian cause our first advice, "that they seek not to evince the truth of the gospel by any other proofs, than those which Jesus Christ himself hath appealed to."

CAN we, indeed, without serious astonishment observe, how utterly some, who profess to believe this gospel, seem to have forgotten, or at least to disregard this appeal, when we hear them assigning a purpose of the gospel-miracles, altogether different from that to which their blessed author applied them; and pompously exerting the utmost efforts of their genius, to fetch (for the benefit, or rather for the admiration, of wits and scholars) from the waste regions of metaphysic, or from palpable Egyptian darkness, some new demonstration of the divine authority

of those doctrines, which carry their own credentials, as it were interwoven with them, in the volume of the book in which they stand recorded?

LET these credentials be adhered to and insisted on, and the whole controversy between christians and infidels (those, I mean, who allow that miracles are not *absolutely and essentially incredible*) will center in this single question, “whether the miracles of the gospel are manifestly efforts of that divine power to which their authors ascribed them; or whether evil spirits are capable of enabling men to effect those instantaneous changes in the order and constitution of nature, (for the purpose of gaining credit to falsehood and imposture) which are attributed to Jesus Christ and his apostles?”

IF the latter part of this question be affirmed, the consequence will be, that he who cannot reconcile every scripture-difficulty with his own (perhaps erroneous) conceptions of things, will be compelled to give up the whole bible, as recording acts or doctrines unworthy of God, and consequently to ascribe the miracles by which they are enforced, to the agency of evil spirits.

BUT if the former branch of the question be determined, as I trust all christians will determine it, in the affirmative, then will the whole matter of revelation demand to be admitted, upon the authority of the miracles, as the truth of God; utterly precluding the vain, arrogant, endless

less task of previous examination^{*}; and all difficulties which may occur in the doctrines and acts recorded there, will be ascribed to their true cause, the defect of that degree of information which is requisite for a decisive determination concerning them.

a Though the question under debate can receive no determination from human authority, being decideable only by the nature of the gospel-miracles, and by the authority of the gospel, (the former of which considerations ought to weigh with infidels, and both with Christians;) yet as the authority of *Origen* ought to be of some weight with my adversary, who hath so frequently appealed to it, I will here produce a short passage from that author, which if Mr. Heathcote had read, or had not forgotten, he would probably have thought it most adviseable to pass over the name of *Origen* in silence. The passage occurreth in the very front of his pleadings against the infidel-objections of *Celsus*, and its exact translation is as followeth.

“ O μι^ν ουμε^ν κ.λ. Our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, when false witnesses appeared against him, kept silence; and, when he was accused, answered nothing; persuadeth that his whole life and his acts amongst the Jews, were of more weight than words which might refute the false testimony, and an apologetic harangue in answer to his accusation. And yet you, good Ambrosius, have, unaccountably, pressed me to write an apology in reply to the false testimonies of *Celsus* against the christians, and to his accusations of the faith of the Churches; as if the FACTS did not carry with them an evident refutation; as if the word were not more powerful than all learning, to overthrow false testimonies, and to deprive accusations of all prospect of success.” Having cited several passages of the gospels to confirm his assertion concerning our blessed Saviour’s conduct, and added some short observations upon it, he proceedeth thus; “ I am bold, therefore, to affirm, that the apology which you are pleased to require from me, serveth to weaken (the convincing force of) THAT APOLOGY WHICH LIETH IN FACTS, and (of) that power of Jesus, which is evident to all who are not void of understanding.” After this peremptory declaration in favour of the decisive evidence of the gospel-miracles, one may justly wonder what could reasonably induce this christian author to write a book which he was perswaded would only weaken that powerful and genuine evidence: and one may as justly doubt, whether

IT is not indeed, I fear, to be expected that this gospel-method of reasoning in support of gospel-truths will effectually (in Mr. Heathcote's language) "restore all infidels to their right mind, " and make them submit at once to the authority of revelation." That it would convince the understandings of such of them as should diligently attend to it, is not to be doubted; but for "restoring unbelievers to their right mind, and " making them submit to the authority of revelation," much more is necessary than the conviction of the understanding. He *who knoweth what is in man* hath informed us, that no man cometh unto God, accepteth his salvation, without seeing eyes and hearing ears, and a converted heart, turned away from the world's corruptions and vanities to serve the living God; without a penitent, awakened sense of the lost estate, and misery, and death which hath *passed upon all men*, and a stedfast purpose of heart to come unto the Saviour of the world, demonstrated to be the son of God with power, *that he may have life.*

But though neither reasoning from the miracles, nor from any other grounds, will be capable of producing in men that effectual, obedient faith which is the gift of God to the prayer of willing, prepared hearts; this direct appeal

"his obsequious readiness to comply with the commands of his friend," be a sufficient justification of an undertaking, so sure, in his own judgment, to do mischief to the christian cause.

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to those mighty powers to which Jesus Christ and his apostles appealed, will, however, banish into the scholastic regions of dust and silence, those idle, curious, preliminary questions, concerning the wisdom, justice, fitness, propriety, consistency, of such acts and doctrines as, being only by the eye of reason, seen in part, cannot, either with wisdom, or justice, or fitness, or propriety, or consistency, be decisively pronounced upon.

GREAT geniuses, ambitious of *making them a name* may affect, by strong efforts of sagacity and rhetorical invention, to *build a tower whose top may reach to heaven*, to look into and unveil the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God ; but such attempts will naturally and necessarily end in *confusion*.

THE investigation of divine truths must, as God hath signified to us, be undertaken by a different procedure. Whatever be the plan of some modern defenders of christianity, the first assent which Jesus Christ demandeth, is to the validity of the indisputably divine credentials, the miracles of the gospel. Upon their warrant, let us receive it for what they demonstrate it to be, the word of God, and attend to it with that reverential awe, which befitteth those to whom God is speaking ; and then will he open our understandings, that we may understand those wonderful things, which “he hath hid from the “wise and prudent in their own conceit, and “hath revealed them unto babes,” unto those meek, and holy, and humble men of heart, who seek

seek for discernment in the things of the spirit of God by those means, by which alone, as he hath apprized us, they are to be so discerned, as to operate in bringing forth their genuine fruit, the holiness whose end is everlasting life.



F I N I S.

